

THE Christian CENTURY

Thinking Critically. Living Faithfully.

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CHURCH IN THE MAKING

"Being church together as older and younger Christians makes us aware of our differing opinions, needs, and viewpoints.

"The problem arises when we don't understand that the dominant culture reflects a particular generation. We confuse prevalence with sacredness. The distinctions become more acute as we close some churches and plant new ones.

"We should remember that the churches planted today also reflect a particular culture. The key will be to celebrate and support differences and interpret them for one another."



"Carol Howard Merritt has a welcome (if unsettling) clarity about where the church is now as well as an inspired vision of where it ought to be."

—Paul Brandeis Raushenbush, executive religion editor of the *Huffington Post*

Carol Howard Merritt writes *Church in the Making* for the *Christian Century*.

THE
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CENTURY

Toxic politics

THE ILLINOIS gubernatorial election was important. The state is in dreadful shape, with huge debt and underfunded pension liabilities. But during the campaign, debate on these economic issues was overshadowed by low-minded attacks. Televised ads charged one candidate with negligence regarding the nursing homes where he had financial interest. That ad was countered with one accusing the second candidate of releasing incarcerated criminals who then committed major crimes, including rape and child molestation. Often these ads came back-to-back between innings of the World Series. I was grateful for the mute button on the television remote.

Who pays for these commercials? Not the official Democratic or Republican campaign organizations, but political action committees (PACs) and lobbies whose donors remain anonymous because of the Supreme Court's decision in the *Citizens United* case. In a recent editorial, *New York Times* journalist Timothy Egan asked, "How did we lose our democracy? Slowly at first, and then all at once. This fall, voters are more disgusted, more bored and more cynical about the midterm elections than at any time in at least two decades" ("The Disgust Election," October 23).

Citizens United removed restrictions on the amounts that individuals and organizations can contribute to political campaigns anonymously. The effect has been dramatic—and toxic. Spending from outside groups increased from \$5 million in 2000 to \$1 billion in 2012. Clearly the court gave the very wealthy enormous power to manipulate the political process.

The Supreme Court is also upholding voter identification laws that could keep as many as 600,000 people from voting, mostly poor people and minorities. Ironically, there is very little evidence that voter fraud is a problem. In her dissent from the court's decision, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg called the law "purposefully discriminatory" and "one that likely imposes an unconstitutional poll tax."

The effect of the two decisions is to increase voter cynicism. That's not new, of course. In 1828 John Quincy Adams's presidential campaign called Andrew Jackson's mother a prostitute and accused his wife of promiscuity. Abraham Lincoln was mocked as "ape-like," and one newspaper suggested that he moved to Illinois to scare away wolves. In a frightening ad showing a little girl picking petals from a daisy, Lyndon Johnson's campaign suggested that Republican Barry Goldwater would start a nuclear war if elected. Elizabeth Dole called Kay Hagan "godless" in her 2000 senatorial campaign, a move that some say contributed to her losing the election.

Political analysts and academics are studying the proliferation of negative advertising. Ruthann Weaver Lariscy, a journalism professor at the University of Georgia, says we are flooded with these negative ads "because they work and work very well" in a climate of political apathy and inactivity.

It saddens me that negative political advertising works. I'm haunted by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's observation that the great sin of respectable people is refusing to be responsible. But at the same time my faith gives me hope for saner, more responsible, and issues-oriented political campaigns in the future.

WHO'S BLOGGING AT CHRISTIANCENTURY.ORG?

Drew Hart explores discipleship and ethics at his blog **Taking Jesus Seriously**
Carol Howard Merritt surveys the religious landscape at her blog **Tribal Church**

Steve Thorngate blogs about public life and culture at **In the World**

CCblogs highlights posts from the CENTURY's network of independent bloggers

Various bloggers write for **Blogging Toward Sunday** (on the lectionary) and
Then and Now (on U.S. religious history)

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IN THIS Issue

-
- 6** **Letters**
Faithful reading
- 7** **Is compromise always good?**
The Editors: After the midterms
- 8** **CenturyMarks**
Economics of Ebola, etc.
- 10** **Bonds of affection**
Scott Bader-Saye: How do we love when we disagree?
- 12** **Pastor on two wheels**
G. Travis Norvell: The winter I gave up my car
- 13** **Secret holes**
Brian Doyle: Families and their empty chairs
- 22** **The war against rest**
Benjamin J. Dueholm: Sabbath piety and sabbath politics
- 26** **The court after *Hobby Lobby***
David Heim: Religious freedom expert Brent Walker
- 30** **Narcissism is normal**
Eric Miller: The promise of self-esteem

NEWS

- 14** West African Methodists in U.S. mourn;
Iraqi Christians ponder their future;
More than 30 U.S. cities restricting food programs for
homeless people

IN REVIEW

- 34 Books**
Sarah Morice Brubaker: *Theology and the End of Doctrine*,
by Christine Helmer
Walter Brueggemann: *True and Holy*, by Leo D. Lefebure
Paul Parker: *Mapping Exile and Return*, by Alain Epp Weaver
Tania Runyan: *Gold*, by Barbara Crooker
- 41 Media**
Kathryn Reklis: Sex in the lab
- 42 Music**
Lou Carlozo: *The Boat That Carries Us*, by Peter Himmelman
- 47 Art**
Lil Copan: The gallery at Nashville's Downtown
Presbyterian Church, and *Triptych*, by Cary Gibson

COLUMNS

- 3 Editor's Desk**
John M. Buchanan: Toxic politics
- 20, 21 Living by the Word**
Matthew Schlimm
- 33 Faith Matters**
Samuel Wells: Dressed for the moment
- 45 Notes from the Global Church**
Philip Jenkins: Imperial missionaries?

POETRY

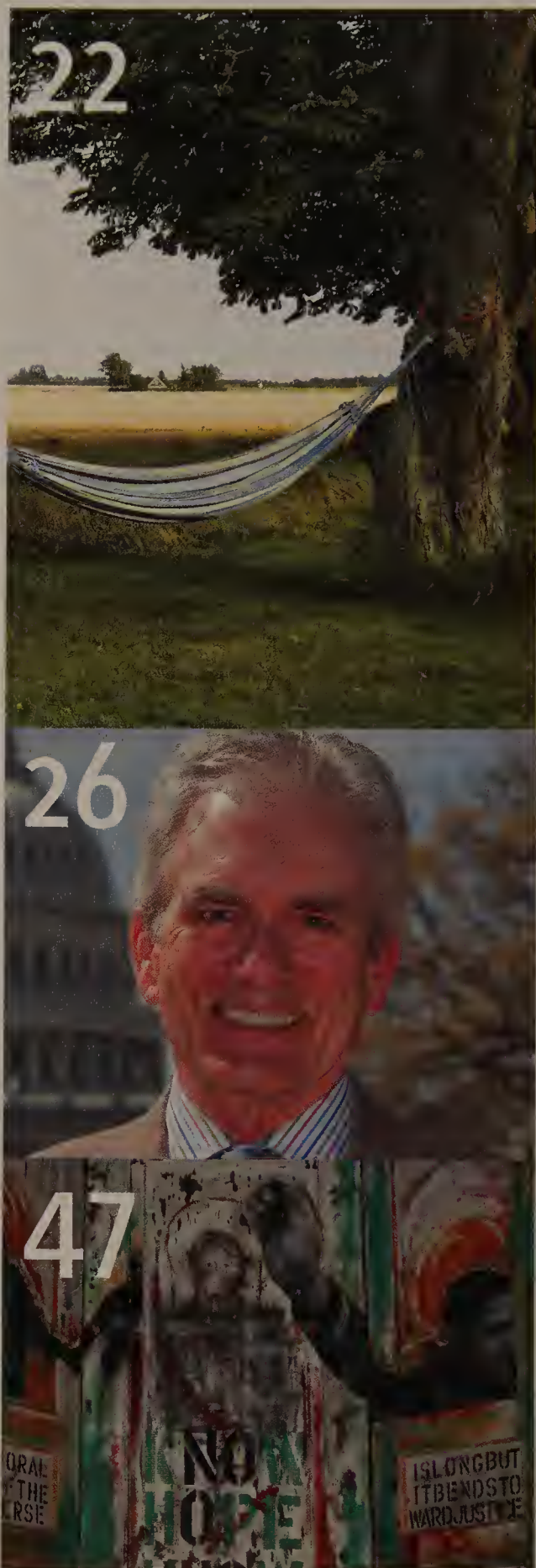
- 11 Jean Janzen:** Hive
- 24 Julie Pennington-Russell:** In the receiving line after worship
- 32 Mark Goad:** On the evening of that same day

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Faithful reading

Despite the impression given by Alexandra Brown's review of *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Oct. 29), your readers might like to know three things. First, I use the term *worldview* to indicate a combination of factors of which narrative is only one (the others being symbol, praxis, and questions). Second, I make it clear that for Paul the largest story of all is precisely that of creation and new creation; it is this that generates his radical new ways of knowing. Third, I expound Paul's reading of Israel's covenantal scriptures as being all about the divine grace and mercy, enacted and defined by the cross. One of my central arguments is that Paul is both an apocalyptic *and* a covenant theologian, and that these two define and support one another, as they do in ancient Jewish "apocalypses." I should be sorry if the false antithesis between these two were perpetuated (perhaps, despite my best efforts, by a misunderstanding of covenant as somehow restrictive); sorrier still if anyone supposed that I was backing one against the other.

N. T. Wright
University of St. Andrews
Edinburgh

Alexandra Brown responds . . .

My review of Wright's 1,700 pages required making judgments about where the weight of his argument lies. Concerning his first point: I still hold that narrative is the most pervasive of his "worldview" categories; it is definitive for the structure of the argument and controlling of multiple data that emerge from other categories.

The second and third points in Wright's letter together concern his characterization of apocalyptic. While he claims that Paul is both apocalyptic and covenantal—a claim I acknowledge in my review—his negative characterizations of others' "apocalyptic" readings (scare quotes his) of Paul either neglect (exegetically) or dismiss (rhetorically) strands of Paul's apocalyptic vocabulary

that fit less neatly within Wright's own particular reading of covenant.

Throughout his book he underestimates, to my ear, the cosmic apocalyptic newness of what Paul himself says is enacted by the cross: the "crucifixion of the world" to Paul, and Paul's own "crucifixion to the world," such that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision count for anything, but a new creation" (Gal. 6:14–15). Isn't the "new creation" that Paul announces here something more encompassing than "election freshly reworked"? The proliferation of this "re-" prefix throughout Wright's volume seems to make new creation more of a corrective operation within what already exists than God's radical calling into being of nonbeings (1 Cor. 1) and God's deliverance of all from futility (Rom. 8) into a new creation that thus can both include and transcend covenant identity.

Alexandra Brown
Lexington, Va.

Wright's book is a dense, well-documented work that needs more attention than it's getting. But what became clear to me after reading it was the lack of scholarship available concerning the relation between Paul and the Gospels. We have lots of work on Paul and lots of work on the Gospels, but I recall few or no studies of the relationship of one to the other. We are all aware of Q, The Book of Sayings, and the Book of Signs. But if Wright is on target, then Paul's writings must have had a tremendous impact on the authors of the Gospels at the end of the first century. To wit, Peter's confession in the Gospel of Matthew: "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you." Could that mean that Peter's Jewish heritage would not sustain that claim? And is Paul whispering in the background, "But I can"? Wright's work may be the beginning of some marvelous new studies.

Stephen M. Hall
Clayton, Ga.

Baptismal basin . . .

In "Watershed disciples" (Oct. 29), Katherine Mast notes that the "first, most fundamental meaning of watershed discipleship is based on the ecological principle of watershed basins." I'd add that the theological corollary is the baptismal basin. Just as our "lives are bounded by hydrologic systems," according to Elaine Enns, so too our lives are bounded by the logic of our baptismal vows. Accordingly, Christians might have hope that our watershed discipleship is more than a "small drop in a very large bucket," for it connects with what Dennis Sanders notes in "Living by the Word" about our "hope in the coming resurrection, hope in the day when all creation will be healed"—namely, the new creation as symbolized by our eight-sided baptismal fonts, representing the eighth day.

Tobias Winright
St. Louis, Mo.

Marriage without sex . . .

What is marriage now?" (Oct. 29) makes the fatal mistake of separating theology from reality. As a campus minister, I believe that framing marriage as the ideal for sexual expression misses the depth to which my students understand the covenant. The decision to marry involves deep discernment around future hopes, one's own shortcomings, and the capacity to give oneself fully to another. In our society and churches, marriage is upheld as a mark of success regardless of whether it works to empower each partner to live into the fullness of Christ or not.

To claim that young adults are mere victims of their parents' mistakes inappropriately grounds their identity in their past rather than in the claim of the Holy Spirit upon their lives through their baptism. Faithful Christians need conversation about marriage and cohabitation that goes beyond sex.

Sarah A. Colwill
Philadelphia, Pa.

November 26, 2014

Is compromise always good?

At the national level, there was only one real question going into the November 4 elections: Would the Democrats keep the Senate? They didn't. For the next two years, it's essentially President Obama against Congress. The Senate minority party does have considerable power, and the remaining Democrats may manage to keep some Republican legislation off the president's desk. But Obama will almost certainly have to do more of something the Senate has until now protected him from: choose between signing Republican bills and vetoing them.

Would compromise be better than gridlock? It sounds like an easy question. We want our elected officials to actually accomplish something. As Christians we are keenly aware of the importance of coming together for the greater good. Amid deep division, the alternative to compromise—inaction—seems like outright failure.

The problem is the assumption that a compromise position is an improvement on the status quo. This isn't always the case.

To be sure, it often is. Getting the Affordable Care Act passed required the bill to be watered down, convoluted, and larded with perks for the very industries that have helped make U.S. health care such a mess. Yet the 2010 law was a clear step forward, enabling millions of uninsured Americans to get coverage. Or take our broken immigration system. A compromise bill that includes even incremental steps toward a path to citizenship would directly improve the lives of families living in this country. Middle-ground bills can be good ones.

But not always. During the Clinton administration, a divided government compromised to enact welfare reform. While the 1996 law has been praised for replacing simple cash assistance with “welfare to work,” it also replaced a program that helped 12.6 million low-income Americans with one that currently serves about 4 million. For the millions who lost their benefits, gridlock would have been better. This year's farm bill debate hinged on the question of whether to make small cuts to food stamps—the bill's largest and most unambiguously useful program—or to make larger ones. While the farm bill is a complex thing with many stakeholders, for the hungry at least, inaction may have been the best option on the table.

In our two-party system, it's tempting to believe that the best ideas lie somewhere in between. But compromise is not itself an adequate ethical yardstick for judging legislation. We Christians have other, better standards. What serves the common good? What promotes human flourishing? Sometimes the best answers come from the middle. Other times they might come from one side or the other, or even from the margins of mainstream discourse.

The next two years will offer many opportunities for elected officials to choose whether to meet in the middle. We should demand that they work within the political constraints to pursue a more just and fair society—both when this means accepting compromise and when it means accepting gridlock.

Gridlock may be bad, but sometimes it's the best viable option.

CENTURY marks

GREAT FEAT: During Hitler's siege of Leningrad in the winter of 1941–42, the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich and the entire Leningrad Philharmonic were evacuated from the city. A performance of Shostakovich's seventh symphony, dedicated to the city of Leningrad, was planned for August 9, 1942. There were barely enough musicians left in the city to perform it. The score had to be flown in over German lines, and musicians were pulled from the front lines to bolster the meager ranks of musicians left behind. This performance was a show of resistance in a city which had just lost 1.2 million people (NPR, November 2).

ECONOMICS OF EBOLA: Dr. Paul Farmer, an infectious disease specialist known for his work in Haiti, has been to

Liberia and planned to go back again in the fight against Ebola. According to Farmer, the outbreak of Ebola is a symptom of a very poor and weak health-care system in the three West African countries where it is spreading. In Liberia there is one physician per 100,000 people, compared to 240 in the United States. The president of Liberia points out that the Dallas Cowboys stadium uses more electricity each year than her whole country. Vaccines and drugs don't exist because Ebola's victims are poor and—so far—not very numerous (*London Review of Books*, October 23).

KEEPING THE FAITH: Parents are the largest factor in whether youth remain religiously active as young adults, according to the National Study of Youth and Religion. When parents

talked about faith at home, were active in their congregations, and attached great significance to their faith, 82 percent of their children were highly religious in their mid to late twenties. Two-thirds of young adults raised by black Protestant parents and one half of those with conservative Protestant parents had high or moderate levels of religious commitment as young adults. Seventy percent of young adults raised by mainline Protestants showed minimal or lower levels of religious commitment (*Huffington Post*, October 29).

NO RETURNS: Thom Ranier did an unscientific study to find out why many church visitors never return to a congregation. The top ten reasons: having to stand up and greet others during the service; unfriendly church members; unsafe and unclean children's area; no place to get information; a bad church website; poor signage; insider church language (favorite example: "The WMU will meet in the CLC in the room where the GAs usually meet"); boring or bad worship services; a member asking a guest to move from the member's seat or pew; and dirty facilities ("restrooms were worse than a bad truck stop") (ThomRanier.com, November 11).

WHO CARES? In 30 years there will be as many people over 80 as under five, but there likely won't be enough medical personnel to care for them. Medical students aren't choosing geriatric care because the work is too hard and the pay too low. Some medical students shy away from geriatrics because they don't like to face death, says one med school professor. "They'd rather take an anatomy exam for the eighth time than face a dying person," he said (*Vox*, October 30).



EXTREME MEASURES: Larry Ellison, one of the wealthiest Americans, is spending millions of dollars on research to prolong life. “Death makes me very angry. It doesn’t make any sense,” Ellison explained. Mortician Caitlin Doughty says it shouldn’t surprise us that almost all the people who want to use extreme measures to stay alive are rich, white males, “men who have lived lives of systematic privilege and believe that privilege should extend indefinitely” (*Vox*, October 30).

HEALTH-CARE DIFFERENCE: About 10 million more people in the United States have health insurance this year because of the Affordable Care Act, which has helped offset income inequality by redistributing income to the poorest people in the form of health insurance or insurance subsidies. Benefiting most are those in the 18–34 age bracket, blacks, Hispanics, and those living in rural areas. Despite Republican resistance to Obamacare, people in largely Republican areas have greater coverage gains than those in predominantly Democratic areas (*New York Times*, November 2).

GIVE THEM HOPE: The Soufan Group, a security intelligence firm in New York, has issued a report that concludes that ISIS doesn’t pose much of a threat to the United States and that the United States can’t do much about the threat ISIS poses. Putting boots on the ground in Iraq and Syria would unite the various rebel groups against the United States. Yet ISIS is unprecedented in the modern age: it’s capable of functioning as either a terrorist group or a nation-state, depending on which best serves its purpose (*The Christian Science Monitor*, October 30).

CALM COMMUTING: An increasing number of people are practicing meditation techniques while commuting to work. They focus on their breathing or on sights, sounds, and physical sensations to help keep them in the present. Denise Keyes takes the train to her job at Georgetown University. She says meditating prepares her for work. “I want to be compassionate and really listen to people. This helps me do that” (*Washington Post*, October 19).

“While I have never denied my sexuality, I haven’t publicly acknowledged it either, until now. So let me be clear: I’m proud to be gay, and I consider being gay among the greatest gifts God has given me.”

— Tim Cook, Apple CEO, in his first public statement about his sexual orientation (*Bloomberg Businessweek*, October 30)

“There is definitely a search for spirituality. Yet spirituality per se is not going to get us where we need to be because spirituality is what happens when religion goes bowling alone. It is very self-focused.”

— Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi of England, pondering what he claims is a desecularization process in Western countries (*Spectator*, November 1)

ATTENTION DEFICIT: Our culture has an attention deficit disorder. Mark Edmundson, a University of Virginia professor, says that we’re losing the ability to become absorbed, to lose ourselves in something we love doing. “When that happens, time stops and one lives in an ongoing present.” Absorption in something like the arts can benefit others as well as oneself, while paying attention on the job or in school seems like a task that leads quickly to boredom (*Hedgehog Review*, Summer).

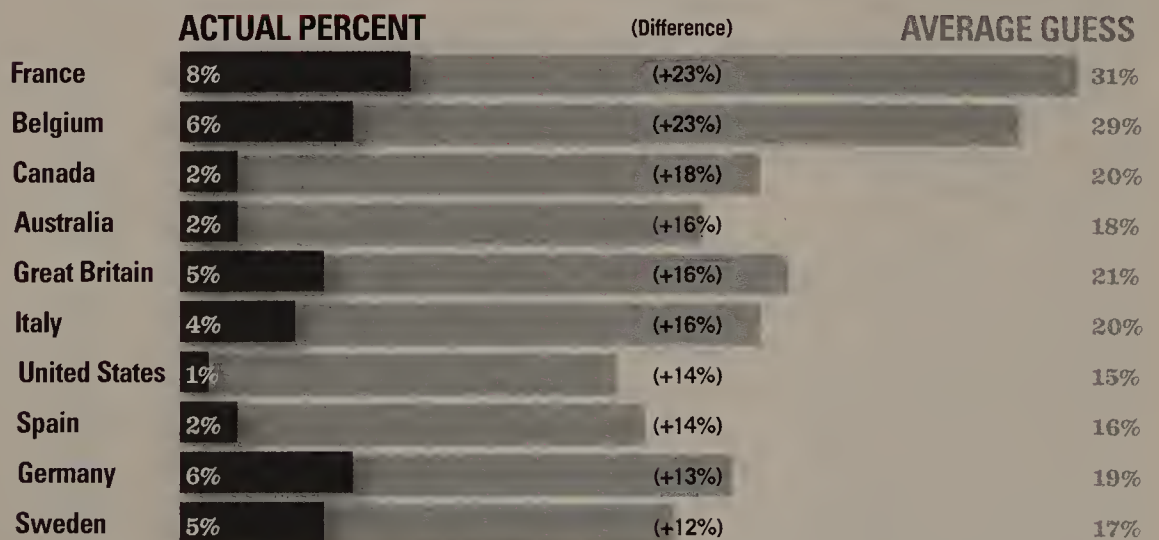
RAGS TO RICHES? Nineteenth-century novelist Horatio Alger Jr. has become synonymous with the American rags-to-riches mythology, but it’s a story

that he never lived himself. The son of a Congregational minister in Massachusetts, Alger became a Unitarian minister. Confronted with allegations about nefarious acts he had committed with young boys, Alger left town. Alger’s father talked the church officials out of going public with the evidence and promised that his son would never again seek a ministerial position. Alger took up a writing career in New York City, where he befriended many boys whose tough-luck stories Alger worked into his novels. No allegations were ever made about Alger’s relationship with these boys, who were very loyal to their patron (John Swansburg, *Slate*, September 29).

ISLAMOPHOBIA?

SOURCE: IPSOS MORI

Citizens of Western countries tend to overestimate the percent of Muslims living in their own country:



How do we love when we disagree?

Bonds of affection

by Scott Bader-Saye

WHAT DOES IT take to hold people together despite disagreements and differences? It seems a very basic question, but it is hard to answer.

This past summer witnessed various church bodies wrestling with weighty and divisive issues. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted at its General Assembly to permit Presbyterian clergy to perform same-sex weddings in states where this is legal. In another contested move, the PCUSA decided to divest from certain corporations whose business with Israel was seen to be supportive of the occupation of Palestinian territories. The Church of England voted to ordain women as bishops over the outcry of those still hoping for reconciliation with Rome. A United Methodist Church committee reinstated a Methodist minister who had been defrocked for performing the wedding of his gay son. Each of these decisions challenged the ties that bind people together in these churches.

Given these realities, how do we make sense of Jesus' words in John 13:34–35 in which he makes love for one another the key mark of the church? "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." What kind of love can be nurtured and sustained honestly in the midst of such disagreement?

In his insightful study *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis parses the varieties of love by exploring four Greek terms: *eros*, *philia*, *storge*, and *agape*. In looking at this work recently I wondered why *storge* (affection) had never been given the same theological attention as *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*. Theological debates about *eros* and *agape* (love as desire and love as gift) have raged at least since Anders

Nygren's *Agape and Eros* (1930). Recent theologians have emphasized the significance of *philia*, friendship, arguing that friendship with God is the ultimate end of human life and the glue that holds together the body of Christ. Drawing on Aristotle's account of friendship as determinative for the good working of the polis, theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches (in *Christians among the Virtues*), as well as Paul Wadell (*Friendship and the Moral Life* and *Becoming Friends*), have urged us to think about the centrality of friendship in the Christian life.

But what of *storge*? Is affection just

the terms of a contract in such a way that the relational goods we count as part of the bonds of affection are replaced by quasi-legal accountability.

What is the theological and ecclesial significance of affection? Affection grows by virtue of shared time and space. Its most basic form is the love shared within families, but it includes the fond feelings we have for people in our neighborhood or workplace or for pets. What is most interesting about affection is that it does not rely on shared interests, ideas, or passions (as does friendship), nor does it rely on

Affection grows out of the routines of common life. It is "the least discriminating of loves."

too weak to do any theological work? One place where affection lives on as an ecclesial description is in the phrase "bonds of affection," long used in the Anglican Communion to describe the connection that links churches of that tradition across history, continents, and languages. In recent years this phrase has become important as those bonds have been strained by debates over homosexuality and women's ordination.

To remedy the strain, one proposal, now in its death throes, was to create an Anglican Covenant that would define more precisely and juridically the nature of the communion. While I think there is a good biblical basis for the language of covenant, I am also aware how quickly the terms of a covenant can morph into

shared attraction (as does *eros*). Rather, it grows out of the regular routines of shared life, short conversations, exchanged pleasantries, and proffered gratuities. Affection is of all the loves most linked to place—it arises among those who find themselves sharing a common life not because they chose one another but because they found themselves thrown together.

Affection may be what we most need in the church because, as Lewis observes, affection is "the least discriminating of loves. . . . Almost anyone can become an object of Affection. . . . There need be no apparent fitness between those whom it unites."

The danger of thinking about the church in terms of friendship is that it

may imply that we need a high level of agreement in order to be church together. This is a potential recipe for schism. Further, as Aristotle noted, it is hard to have many true friends. We are not likely to find a large number of people with whom we share a great deal, and even if we did, we are unlikely to have the time to develop those relationships. Yet we can share affection for a wide swath of people with whom we do not have much in common and with whom we may not be inclined to be friends.

One of the gifts that arises from affection is that we begin to appreciate things about one another that we might not have attended to otherwise. Lewis notes that affection “can ‘rub along’ with the most unpromising people. Yet oddly enough this very fact means that it can in the end make appreciations possible which but for it, might never have existed.”

Just as the reader with wide taste can find a suitable book on the rack outside a store for used books, Lewis writes, so “the truly wide taste in humanity will similarly find something to appreciate in the cross-section of humanity whom one has to meet every day. In my experience it is Affection that creates this taste, teaching us first to notice, then to endure, then to smile at, then to enjoy, and finally to appreciate, the people who ‘happen to be there.’”

I wonder if some people leave church because they expect to find a community of like-minded friends and instead bump up against cranky people who rub them the wrong way. Focusing on affection helps us to have realistic expectations. We may never really like everyone in the pews around us, but we can strive to notice, endure, smile, and even appreciate them. I cherish fond memories of an older gentleman in a parish I attended many years back. He was a bit gruff at times, though he seemed to know this, and he would regularly conclude a nay-saying rant with “I’m askin’, OK? I’m just askin’.” In those words of meager but authentic humility, he made it possi-

ble for many of us to have affection for him.

I think of the relationship that has grown between the people I regularly ride the bus to work with and the regular driver. The affection that has developed over time emerged out of small acts of gratuity—the shared smile, the “thank you,” the “have a nice day” that exceeded the payment already made for the ride. Such excess of mannerly gratuity may seem small, but over time it increases affection, which heightens sympathy and can become meaningful when, say, discussions arise at city council meetings about compensation for bus drivers. What moves many of us at that moment is not likely an abstract account of a just wage (though that would not be a bad thing) but rather the affection that has convinced us we share a common life.

Cultivating affection requires a deep commitment to presence. It cuts against

cultural trends toward mobility and virtual relationships. Physical presence, bodily quirks, and simply brushing up against one another all contribute to affection. Affection grows from the soil of time and space, from commitment to place and community. Gathering becomes the critical practice through which one learns to love those we thought we couldn’t love, those who are not like us, those who will never be more than acquaintances. This is not to say that affection requires no effort at all, but that the effort is more like receiving the presence of the other than striving to make common cause with the other.

Affection may seem a weak aspiration when compared to more robust forms of love. But it brings its own peculiar gifts of enjoyment and appreciation that may finally be crucial for sustaining churches that can no longer rely on shared judgments to make us one body. Perhaps they will know we are Christians by our affection. **CC**

Hive

Honeybees hum in the chimney
as they work, nothing deterring
them from their devotion to our home,
not smoke, chemicals, or beekeepers.

Forty years of honey stored
inside the brick flue for generations
unknown, all of it perfectly
packed into tiny compartments,

much like our own gathering
and storing, what we guard like
worker bees fanning the queen.
In a dream the chimney overflows

in summer heat, honey streaming
over the roof. Time to sort, to give
and throw away, I say, tossing
books, clothes, even money.

And still I awaken into disbelief—
my unimaginable abandonment.
O sweet world, your mornings of lips
and birdsong. The deep sleep of winter.

Jean Janzen

Scott Bader-Saye teaches at the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest and is author of Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear.

The winter I gave up my car

Pastor on two wheels

by G. Travis Norvell

LAST WINTER the heater in my car went kaput. It was a terrible time for the heater to stop working. I am a pastor in Minneapolis, where winter is a six-month teeth-chattering battle for warmth. And did I mention that this past winter was the ninth coldest in Minneapolis history?

Nevertheless, a heaterless car in a severe winter turned out to be a blessing—or, in the words of Elvis Costello, a brilliant mistake. For months the idea of giving up my car had been stirring in my soul, but I could not find the courage or the imagination to make it happen. One Sunday evening my 13-year-old daughter asked me to explain Christian socialism (youth do pay attention to sermons—sometimes). I did my best. Later, when I was saying goodnight, she asked, “Dad, what are you willing to give up so others can have more?”

I called a family meeting to propose an experiment that would affect us all: we would not repair the heaterless car nor would we buy another car. Instead, we would sell the car, and I would ride my bike or take the bus to work. Everyone agreed.

I was tired of feeling helpless in the face of climate change, tired of being all talk and no action. I would sacrifice a small amount of convenience, choice, and comfort in order to renew my commitment to the healing of creation.

I took some of the proceeds from the sale of the old car and purchased metal-studded bicycle tires, a pair of heavy-duty gloves (the kind a person handling molten steel would wear), and a bus card. I reckoned that if I could make this idea work in the dead of winter, then I could easily do it year-round.

The devils on my shoulders kept ques-

tioning my decision, asking: How will you get to the nursing homes in the exurbs? How will you respond to emergencies? What will you do when it rains or snows? What about your clothes (you cannot bike in a suit)? Plus, you’ll arrive late and sweaty to meetings.

I did not have the answers to those questions; I hoped the answers would come as I pedaled and rode the bus.

The first few days were horrible. I had not ridden my bike on a regular basis in

I was tired of feeling helpless in the face of climate change, tired of being all talk and no action.

years. Every inch of my body was sore afterward. Then there was the cold. In order to counter the below-zero wind that blasted through my layers of clothing, I would repeat the mantra, “Mother Earth, you better appreciate this. Mother Earth, you better appreciate this.”

When it rained or snowed, I took the bus. At first I had no idea about the bus routes or even how to pay for a bus ride. In 14 years of ministry I had taken the bus only once to get to the inauguration ceremonies of a newly elected mayor. I discovered that bus trips offered the equivalent of a course in human studies. Liberals like me may talk about diversity and economic equality, but many of us rarely spend extended time with the poor or share life with the diverse populations of the city. Riding the bus, I found myself sitting or standing beside a

Somali woman reading Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nickle and Dimed*, a father of five en route from the midnight shift at McDonald’s to his daytime job cleaning offices, a woman with a disability and her abusive aide, a recent college graduate on her way to a job interview, and school kids making their way across the city to the library. Riding in the comfort of my car had kept me from contact or communion with all these people. I had often prayed for the welfare of my city,

but I had little idea whom (or what) I was praying for until I rode the bus.

When my pastoral destination in the exurbs was nowhere near a bus stop and too far away for a bicycle commute, parishioners offered to take me. I was uneasy with this reliance on parishioners. I did not like giving up my control of the situation or surrendering my time to another driver. But many of these trips turned out to be extended pastoral visits. As on all good road trips, the discussions in the car were often deep and revealing—moments of unexpected grace.

At the end of each month I tallied up my savings. By owning only one car, my family pays only one insurance bill and fills up only one gas tank. Needless to say, my mileage reimbursement account at church ends each month with a surplus. If

G. Travis Norvell is pastor of Judson Memorial Baptist Church in Minneapolis.

my bike needs a repair, the cost is a fraction of that of an auto repair. Thus far I have been able to make all the repairs myself, thanks to a \$3.00 used copy of *Glenn's Complete Bicycle Repair Manual*.

Bicycles are simple machines with few moving parts; they are difficult to mess up. I spend my days with broken people, broken buildings, and broken bank accounts—complex things that are easy to mess up. There is nothing more satisfying than actually repairing something that's broken.

Although biking or taking the bus takes longer than driving, these activities offer some fringe benefits. When I bike, I

arrive at the church or nursing home with my mind clear and my soul ready. When I take the bus, I can read, rest, and learn from others.

The sacrifice has caused some stress. Each evening I have to spend a few minutes planning out the next day, mapping out routes, double-checking bus times, and developing a backup plan. I have also had to alter my wardrobe—but there is no better outfit for biking and clergy work than a pair of khakis and a clergy shirt with a removable tab collar.

Not everyone can bike to work, and not everyone can take the bus or has

access to public transit. But we can do meaningful and symbolic acts that will inspire each other, the churches we serve, and the communities we inhabit. We are not helpless. At rush hour, when I look at the solitary masses in their cars while I am pedaling over I-35 or reading on the bus, I want to shout at the top of my lungs, "There are other choices." But those choices will never be visible unless people start living differently, making some small sacrifices for the greater good, and in the process becoming better acquainted with the cities we call home and those whose welfare we pray for each Sunday. **CC**

Secret holes

BY BRIAN DOYLE

EVERY FAMILY has a secret hole. Every family has more people at the table than you can see. If we set the right number of plates for all the people at the table, we would have to build way bigger tables.

No one talks about these holes, and you can understand why, because the holes never actually heal, and they are awash with tidal pain, and when you stumble into a hole again for some reason, a sudden photograph or an artless question, there's the pain again, patient and terrible, as ready with the scalpel as ever, and you stand there in the kitchen, holding onto the counter with both hands, trying to get your breathing back in order, wondering for the hundredth time how it is that pain like this causes you to feel as if you are suddenly hollow, with nothing at all remaining of the crucial organs that used to be behind the flimsy armor of your chest.

I have seen people stumble into their holes. I have watched it happen. You can see it happen in the countries of their

faces. I saw a man look at a photograph and see the brother who wasn't in it. I saw that happen on his face. I saw a woman say "two" when someone asked her how many children she had and I realized the answer was three. I have seen a woman fall again and again into the hole where her father used to be. I saw a woman just the other day grab hold of the kitchen counter with both hands because she was walking through the kitchen with a platter of food and she slid into the hole left by her baby brother, who was always her baby brother even when he died at 50.

We try all sorts of things to hide the holes. Some people run as fast as they can for as long as they can to stay ahead of their holes. Some people build stories and live inside them. Some people construct lockboxes or complicated labyrinthine jails for their holes. Some people pour whiskey or worse into their holes. Some people get trapped in their holes and become their holes and lose themselves forever. Some people acknowl-

edge their holes and treat them as family members you cannot evade. Some people try to bend their holes into music or paintings or essays or books. Some people pour prayers into their holes. Some people try to become other people altogether so that their holes lose track of them and wander around aimlessly without anyone to haunt.

Everyone is in a family somehow. There are all sorts of families and all families are odd and awkward and shapeshifting, and they all have holes and people herding and huddling and hiding from holes. But it turns out you cannot hide from your holes and they are always there somewhere inside or around you and there is nothing you can do but hold on to the kitchen counter, or reach for someone in your family, whatever kind of family that is, and wait until your crucial organs shuffle back into your hollow chest. There's nothing good about holes other than the way they make you reach for someone else, maybe at the same time that person is reaching for you—which is another one of the things we mean when we try to say what we mean by love, and God, and praying. **CC**

Brian Doyle is editor of *Portland magazine* at the University of Portland. His books include *Leaping: Revelations and Epiphanies*. He recently wrote *A Shimmer of Something: Lean Stories of Spiritual Substance*.

West African Methodists in U.S. mourn

At Spencer Memorial United Methodist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, nearly nine out of ten members are Liberian; another 10 percent are from Sierra Leone. Since the Ebola outbreak began, every Sunday one or more members of the congregation reports the death of another family member in the two West African countries hit hardest by the deadly virus.

"We come in expecting a celebration, a day of worship, but it always turns into a funeral," said Emmanuel Shanka Morris, the pastor, who is Liberian.

The church observed five days of praying and fasting in the month of October. Using 2 Chronicles 7:11–22 and Ezra 8:23 as guiding scriptures, each Wednesday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. people of the congregation interceded for the people of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea.

Across the United States, United Methodist churches with Liberians and Sierra Leoneans are telling similar stories of grief and suffering, while trying to rally support for medical relief.

Albert B. Travell, a member of First United Methodist Church in Arlington, Texas, had seven family members die from Ebola in July. His nieces prepared the body of a sister for her funeral, thinking she died from malaria.

"We have a tradition in Liberia when someone passes away, family members stick around so many days before burial and after burial they cook and everyone eats from the same bowl," he said.

His nieces started getting sick and dying one after another. Now the remaining family is having trouble getting food.

"I am trying to send them some money so they can buy food," Travell said. "I am praying by the grace of God, everything will be all right soon."

Many Liberians living in the United States are stepping up contributions to

family members and friends because so many people are unable to work and are not getting paid, said Richard L. Stryker, a United Methodist pastor and executive director of ethnic ministries for the North Alabama Conference. He is originally from Liberia.

"My wife has lost an aunt, although not to Ebola," Stryker said. "We wonder what role the strain on the already degraded health system played in her death from sickness."

His wife also lost a high school classmate to Ebola. Four out of eight people in her classmate's family died after waiting days for an ambulance to take them to the hospital.

"Sanitation, communication, [and] lack of facilities remain major problems for the prevention of this disease," he said. "I believe people from the West that

are going to help assume a certain level of basic care that is nonexistent."

Lovers Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas has long supported a hospital in Liberia founded by two of its members, Betty and Peter Weato. Now, because of Ebola, the church is raising funds for medical supplies for Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The church's Heart of Africa Fellowship includes members from ten African countries, including Liberia and Sierra Leone. Dallas became a focus of news coverage when a hospital there made the first diagnosis of Ebola in the United States. The death of the man, who was Liberian, the infection of two nurses who cared for him, and the quarantining of people who had contact with him all raised anxiety in the city, said Stan Copeland, Lovers Lane's senior pastor.



RESPONDING TO EBOLA: Eric Pratt (left), lay leader of the Heart of Africa Fellowship in Dallas, and Jacob Keega, the fellowship's pastor, confer after October 19 worship. They have worked on the church's response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa.

PHOTO BY SAM HODGES / UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE



Beatrice Gbanga

African people have faced increased prejudice during the Ebola scare, said Eric Pratt, lay leader of the Heart of Africa Fellowship and a native of Sierra Leone.

"Even your neighbors that you used to play and laugh with, they start to shun you," said Pratt, who has lived in the Dallas area for 29 years.

Beatrice Gbanga, a missionary and medical coordinator for the United Methodist Sierra Leone Conference, served as an expert witness on the Ebola epidemic for some 50 clergy and laity meeting in Plano, Texas, in early October.

"The disease not only affected the fabric of our humanness, it has affected the economy of the country," she said. "The health systems have all broken down. Markets cannot meet. So people are not raising the basic monies that they are used to for their survival."

Another obstacle is that the symptoms of Ebola are similar to malaria.

"We lost a lot of health workers because they have been treating Ebola patients for malaria," she said. "And in the process they got themselves infected."

Watching local television when she was in the Dallas area, she noted the disparities between the response to the Ebola case there—such as quarantining the family and providing a cleaning company—and that in West Africa.

"If we in Sierra Leone and in Liberia had a third of those facilities," she said, "I am sure we would have controlled Ebola by now." —Kathy L. Gilbert and Sam Hodges, United Methodist News Service

Iraqi Christians ponder their future

Basima al-Safar retouches a painting of Jesus outside her house overlooking the flat Nineveh plains, 30 miles north of Mosul.

The murals she paints tell the story of her people, Christians in Iraq. But with Islamic State militants nearby, she is worried that life in Alqosh and towns like it could soon come to an end.

The Assyrian Christian town of around 6,000 people sits on a hill below the seventh-century Rabban Hormizd monastery, temporarily closed because of the security situation. This summer residents of Alqosh fled ahead of Islamic State militants. About 70 percent of the town's residents have returned, yet a sense of unease hangs in the air.

Below the monastery in the boarded-up bazaar a lone shopkeeper waits for customers. At the edge of town local Christian fighters staff lookout posts. With Islamic State fighters just ten miles away, these men and most residents of the town are scared that they may have to flee again.

In August, the Christian town of Qaraqosh, 18 miles east of Mosul, was overrun, along with neighboring villages that have been home to Iraqi Christian communities for centuries. Islamic State

forces came close but never entered Alqosh.

Al-Safar, who has been painting murals for 34 years, was born in Alqosh and shares her brightly colored home with her cousin and nephew. Earlier this summer she fled to Dohuk, a Kurdish city in northern Iraq.

"When I returned, Alqosh was like a ghost town," she said.

Before 2003, there were an estimated 1.5 million Christians in Iraq. These days, about 400,000 remain. In July, Christians fled Mosul in droves after Islamic State militants gave them an ultimatum: convert, pay a tax, or be killed.

Mrayma and Athra Mansour, two Christian brothers, are trying to adjust to the new circumstances.

Athra Mansour used to teach the Syriac language to children in neighboring Tel Isqof.

"Tel Isqof is empty now," he said, sipping a small cup of coffee.

Mrayma Mansour, who used to work as a local disc jockey, has taken up arms with a fledgling Christian militia. He said he wants international protection for his people, in the form of a safe zone, weapons, and training.

"If this doesn't happen, I will get my passport [and] family and try to go to another country because it won't be safe," he said.

Thaer Saeed echoes the frustration.

"No one is working here," he said



WORSHIP AMID DANGER: Afternoon prayer at St. George Church in the historic Assyrian Christian town of Alqosh in Iraqi Kurdistan. Locals adhere to the Chaldean Catholic religion. The town was nearly overrun by Islamic fighters earlier this summer when Peshmerga forces withdrew, abandoning the Christian town.

while playing with his three grandchildren. “I drive a taxi from Baghdad to Alqosh, and I can’t work because it’s too dangerous and there are no customers.”

At 4:30 the St. George church bells chime. A few women and children gather for the service. Most of the aisles are empty. Prayers are read in the ancient Syriac language, a dialect of Aramaic believed to have been spoken by Jesus.

Wadhah Sabih, a deacon from the town, is proud of its Assyrian history. The people of Alqosh have defended themselves in the face of many invaders throughout the centuries, he said, but now “we are living cautiously; every family is ready to flee.”

Back in her home al-Safar smokes a cigarette and reflects.

“I will paint the Christians as homeless people, emigrating with bags,” she said. “I will paint the truth.” —Cathy Otten, Religion News Service

More than 30 U.S. cities restricting food programs for homeless people

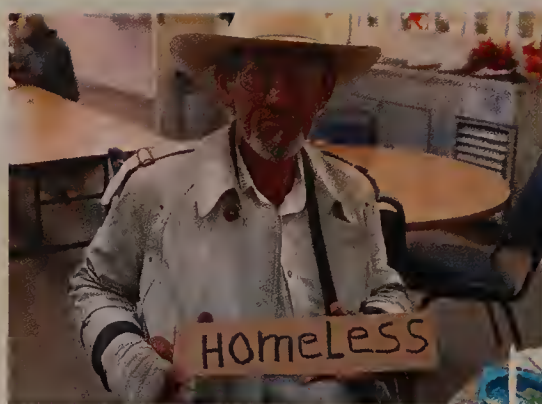
A 90-year-old man and two clergy received citations on November 2 after Fort Lauderdale, Florida, became the latest city to place restrictions on feeding the homeless.

Arnold Abbott, who founded Love Thy Neighbor in 1991, has been providing food to homeless people at a local beach for more than 20 years. “After I was cited, I took everybody over to a church parking lot. We did feed everybody. It wasn’t a complete waste.”

Abbott, who has been ordered to appear in court, faces a maximum of 60 days in jail.

The new regulations state that operations for feeding the homeless outside must be at least 500 feet apart, allowing for only one such station per city block. Feeding operations must also be 500 feet away from residential properties, the *Sun Sentinel* reported.

Although churches may host indoor feeding programs, all organizations serving food outside need property owners’ permission, the *Sun Sentinel* reported.



INDOOR ONLY: Ken McEwan, a homeless veteran, poses at the Soup Kitchen, sponsored by Community Cooperative Ministries in Fort Myers, Florida. More than 30 U.S. cities have restricted or are in the process of restricting the sharing of food with the homeless.

These stipulations, passed in late October, will limit options for the homeless, said Ray Sternberg, who works with homeless people at Fort Lauderdale’s First Baptist Church. But he noted that churches can and will pick up the slack.

“It’s going to cause confusion and hardship on the homeless,” he said. “I think, though, that the ministries that are [feeding the homeless] on a consistent basis will find a way to help.”

Sternberg joined the congregation in 1994 and recalls a Thanksgiving dinner held annually on a blocked-off area on the boulevard where the church is located. Carloads of volunteers would serve hundreds of homeless people each year, he said.

“You have so many homeless here in Fort Lauderdale, and the need is great,” he said.

More than 30 U.S. cities have restricted or are in the process of restricting the sharing of food with the homeless, according to a report from the National Coalition for the Homeless.

The report, called “Share No More: The Criminalization of Efforts to Feed People in Need,” aims to dispel what the authors call a widespread myth—that food sharing perpetuates homelessness.

“In many cases food sharing programs might be the only occasion in which some homeless individuals have access to healthy, safe food,” the report reads.

Denver, Nashville, Philadelphia, and Phoenix are among the U.S. cities that have attempted to restrict, ban, or relocate food sharing, according to the report.

Houston is one of 12 cities that have passed a law restricting property usage, according to the report. The legislation stipulated that written consent is required to feed the homeless, and the authors worry that “the strenuous process to obtain permission will leave the homeless population without food.”

These restrictions, which accompany greater hunger in cities, can come through three channels.

Cities may restrict the use of public property for food sharing, require groups to follow rigorous food safety regulations, and pressure organizations to relocate their programs, according to the report.

In Fort Lauderdale, David Raymond, who has more than two decades of experience in social service work, said he understands in part the decision to limit outdoor service. Feeding the homeless outside may not be the most effective solution, he said, because food should be a means to engage homeless people with other community services.

He said he believes people are better served in indoor areas where they can sit down, shower, and use the bathroom. But, he notes, “some people on the street are resistant to services.”

Another tension that can arise when organizations feed the homeless outside is between those providing services and area businesses.

When homeless people and businesses share a public area, Raymond said, it can “create some hostility” between business owners and people who are trying to do good.

Fort Lauderdale mayor John Seiler’s office could not be reached for comment by press time.

Anne Leomporra, who helped research the National Coalition for the Homeless report, said that the coalition’s nationwide offices have been keeping tabs on changed regulations for the past year.

While poverty continues for many U.S. citizens, Leomporra said that many residents of cities with tightening regulations are not aware of what’s at stake. Education, then, is important to changing the conversation. If anything, she said, these restrictions will make homelessness a more pressing issue for these cities. —Lindsay Ellis, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Greek Orthodox break ground on rebuilding church destroyed on 9/11

Leaders of a church that was destroyed during the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City broke ground on a new St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church that will overlook the 9/11 memorial.

The domed building is scheduled to open in 2016—the church’s 100th anniversary. The church has raised \$7 million of about \$38 million needed.

Plans to rebuild the church were stalled by a dispute with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which is in charge of overall rebuilding efforts at Ground Zero. They reached an agreement in 2011.

Earlier this fall, government and church leaders met on a concrete platform surrounded by steel foundation beams to break ground for the church,

designed by renowned Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. Calatrava, who also designed the nearby World Trade Center Transportation Hub, said he took his inspiration from the Hagia Sophia and the Church of the Holy Savior in Chora, both in Istanbul.

The future building will be “an iconic house of worship,” said Patrick J. Foye, executive director of the Port Authority. “Just as the Greek Orthodox Church celebrates the birth, mourns the death, and praises the resurrection, today we celebrate the rebuilding and the blessing of the hallowed land on which it will stand.”

The 4,100-square-foot church will fit about 150 people at a time—twice the number that the former structure held.

In 2001, that building was hit by falling rubble from the twin towers.

“Breathing a very heavy air, saturated with the dust of storm, wood, iron, and

with tiny particles of human bodies, we remember walking with heavy hearts to the specific place where our St. Nicholas stood as a building,” said Archbishop Demetrios, who heads the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. “The church was not there. . . . We stood there frozen, paralyzed, and cried.”

Some items from the old church were recovered, including a crushed bell, a candelabra, a few Bibles, mangled candles, and two icons, which will be housed in the new church. Relics of St. Nicholas were never recovered.

The rebuilt church will include an interfaith and nonsectarian space for reflection and meditation.

“It will be a refuge for people in need of spiritual comfort, regardless of their specific beliefs or unbeliefs,” Demetrios said. —Sarah Pulliam Bailey, Religion News Service

North Dakota oil boom offers mission field

SVEN HAUGE goes every Thursday to the “man camps” surrounding the oil fields near Williston, North Dakota, and holds worship services that feature preaching, praying, and singing. Sometimes a few men show up, and sometimes nobody does.

“That can be discouraging if you put great importance on counting heads,” he said. “But most of us have learned that it isn’t about numbers.”

Three years ago, Hauge heard God calling him and other members of the Christian Motorcyclists Association to minister in the booming Bakken oil fields, where hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling pump out more than 450,000 barrels of oil a day.

North Dakota has passed Alaska in domestic oil production and is now second to Texas. Daily production by 2017 is expected to nearly triple to 1.2 million barrels. The United States Geological Survey estimates that 7.4 billion barrels of oil will be recovered before the boom plays out, and that’s already making the United States less dependent on foreign oil.

It takes a lot of people to fuel the boom—thousands of them coming to towns like Williston and Watford City,

which are now stretched to meet the needs of this mostly transient population. Some live camped in rows on the prairie; others park RVs in makeshift campgrounds or live in their cars. Few can afford housing in town.

Jim Konsor arrived from South Dakota in 2012 to mine an igneous rock used in the oil fields.

“I heard some pretty tough stories,” he said. “There were so many needs.”

People had arrived hearing that they could make \$80,000 a year, but then realized that kind of pay goes to skilled workers employed directly by the oil companies. Laborers more likely make \$20 an hour or less, which doesn’t go far when monthly rent on an apartment can be \$2,500 or more.

Konsor returned to Watford City with his wife, Kathie, in 2013 and met with pastors, community leaders, and social service agencies to see what they could do. They asked the Dakotas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church for \$100,000—and got \$270,000.

“God told us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to feed the hungry and take care of the least of our brothers in need,” Konsor said.



RISING ANEW: Archbishop Demetrios of America addresses the crowd during a ceremony on October 18 that marked the beginning of rebuilding St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, which was destroyed on 9/11.



Pump jacks near Tioga, North Dakota.

The couple drives a 29-foot converted RV stocked with donated household goods, clothing, blankets, coats, and shoes that they give away. One of the recipients was a pair of cousins, living in an RV with their husbands and children, 12 of them in all. There are times, Konsor said, when he tells people that it would be best if they just went back home.

Robert and Stephanie Newberry came up from Missouri nearly three years ago and settled in Watford City, where the population has exploded from 1,700 to 8,000 or more.

Robert Newberry, a self-described former bad dude from Georgia, survived childhood abuse, addictions, gangs, homelessness, and incarceration. At one time he was destitute and suicidal. Many men drawn to the oil fields are rough-and-tumble like he was.

"To be honest, I really didn't want to be here," he said. "The idea of 50-below-zero weather didn't appeal to me, but God wouldn't leave me alone."

Newberry provides Bibles, shelter, food, and gas money for the men to get to and from work. He leads Celebrate Recovery, an ecumenical worldwide ministry to addicts that's "kind of like AA and NA meets Jesus." When invited, he'll preach at local churches.

"I'm here to let people know that God is here, and he loves them," he said.

Churches around town are holding Bible study groups, activities, and fellowship for men, women, and children. The local Catholic parish struggles to meet a surge in demand for all manner of sacraments.

"You might have 15 men who want to be part of the men's group, but they can't make it because of their schedules," said Brian Gross of Epiphany Catholic Church. "They might not be able to

attend mass on weekends and will come on days when they can."

He has seen an increase in people asking for help.

"They need money because they can't get a job, or they need money for gas or for a bus ticket back home," he said.

The locals, too, wrestle with the changing nature of their communities—overused roads, schools, and services. Some churches are expanding to meet the need. But no one knows when the boom will go bust.

"Where are we going to be ten years down the road?" Gross wondered.
—Maryann Eidemiller, Religion News Service

East African church leaders respond to climate change locally, globally

As the effects of climate change devastate communities in Kenya, church leaders are helping address the crisis locally while calling on industrialized nations to own up to their responsibilities for spewing greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere.

"I think they [industrialized nations] are responsible for most of the emissions," said Peter Solomon Gichira, the climate change program officer at the All Africa Conference of Churches. "They have responsibility to support climate change adaptation and mitigation as a moral obligation."

"But we [in Africa] also have a role to play, because we have not been very good stewards of the environment," added Gichira, a poverty and development expert.

People living in Global South nations such as Kenya are suffering the worst consequences, climate experts say. Droughts have become more severe and recurrent and are frequently followed by excessive rains or floods. Temperatures are much higher, and weather patterns are now unpredictable.

"We need enhanced adaptive capacity in partnership with the nations," said Patrick Maina, a conservationist with the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.

Maina runs a tree planting project on church compounds and members' farms in his presbytery in the Great Rift Valley area. He also gives talks on climate change.

Recently, Maina and other church leaders have stepped up efforts to help communities cope with the crisis.

In eastern Kenya, villagers are constructing structures known as sand dams with support from the Mennonite Central Committee, a relief and development organization. Working through local partners in the Utooni Development Organization, villagers in the largely Christian Utooni area are building large concrete walls across a dry riverbed, stopping or slowing down the rapid flow of rainwater to the Indian Ocean.

The simple structures—231 have been built since 2009—store water under the riverbed, so that it can be used for irrigation, tree planting, and domestic consumption throughout the year. With 50 sand dams constructed each year, the area is much cooler and better to live in, according to Esther Mbolu, a resident of Utooni.

Selena McCoy Carpenter of the Mennonite Central Committee said some people who did not have water access now do, and others who could not grow food are now able to farm.

On the slopes of Mount Kenya, Trade Craft East Africa, a nongovernmental organization, and the Christian Community Services of Mount Kenya East, a development agency in five Anglican dioceses, are helping small-scale farmers adapt to climate change through use of both modern and traditional weather forecasting methods.

Farmers predict weather by using indigenous practices such as watching flying dragonflies, low-swooping swallows, or flowering acacia trees.

But with weather patterns becoming unpredictable, farmers have been adding scientific forecasts delivered by meteorologists to determine when or what crops to plant.

"This is resulting in good harvest," said Eston Njuki, a program officer at British-based Christian Aid, which funded the project with the Anglican Diocese of Mbeere. "The farmers are able to beat or reduce the threat of climate change."
—Fredrick Nzwili, Religion News Service

People

PHOTO BY YORK MINSTER UNDER CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE



■ **John Sentamu**, archbishop of York and the Church of England's number two official, said that Anglican priests should no longer be bound by the centuries-old principle of confidentiality in confessions when they are told of sexual crimes committed against children.

He was speaking at the end of an internal inquiry on whether senior church officials ignored abuse allegations involving children.

"If someone tells you a child has been abused, the confession doesn't seem to me a cloak for hiding that business," he said. "How can you hear a confession about somebody abusing a child and the matter must be sealed up and you must not talk about it?"

Sentamu commissioned the inquiry after an investigation by the *Times* newspaper reported that an Anglican priest and former head of education for the Church of England had been a serial sexual abuser of children in England and Australia for more than 50 years.

"What happened was shameful, terrible," he said.

In July, Anglicans in Australia backed a historic change that breaks the convention that the confidentiality of what a man or woman tells a priest during confession is inviolable.

While more common among Roman Catholics, some traditionalist Anglicans also practice confession, referred to as the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Existing church law demands that the

confession of a crime is to be kept confidential unless the person making the confession consents to the priest disclosing it. The Roman Catholic Church insists that the seal of confession is inviolable—even when it involves a person confessing to sexual crimes committed against children. —Trevor Grundy, Religion News Service

■ **Benjamin A. Reist**, professor emeritus of systematic theology at San Francisco Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., died September 15 of complications arising from Alzheimer's disease. He was 87.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAN FRANCISCO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Reist began his career at Wellesley College in 1952. He assumed a professorship with SFTS in 1957. Early in his career he published works on Ernst Troeltsch and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and upon his retirement he wrote a reflection on John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Jana Childers, SFTS dean, called Reist "one of the mighty lions of God" as a scholar and leader.

"Our mighty lion of God had a magnificent voice," she said, yet he "made room for the voices of thousands of others."

He was a major figure in the creation and early development of the Graduate Theological Union and a founding member of the board of directors of the Center for Theology and Natural Sciences. Reflecting on his life in 1988, Reist wrote that "my professorship was, and remains, a function of my ordination . . . and I continue to think of theology as being in order to [fulfill] the proclamation of the Gospel."

Reist was involved in the civil rights movement and joined the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965. He served on the executive committee of the Presbyterian Church's Council on Church and Race from 1968 to 1977, chairing the council from 1974 to 1975. His book *Theology in Red, White, and Black* looked at the relationship between Christianity and African-American and Native American cultures and theologies.

"He kindled a fire in many of us that connected theology to a passion for

social justice," said Donald Smith, a former student.

Reist was known for many years as America's premier scholar on the thought of Ernst Troeltsch. For generations of students and faculty colleagues, his book *Toward a Theology of Involvement* has come close to being a primary source, offering the fullest account in English of Troeltsch's *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*.

In the last phase of his career Reist focused his research on process theology and the interface between religion, science, and mathematics. He published his fifth and final book, *Processive Revelation*, in 1992, the year he retired.

■ Seven years after officiating at the wedding of his gay son, **Frank Schaefer** has been reinstated as a clergyman in the United Methodist Church.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHY L. GILBERT / UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE

The denomination's top court upheld a June decision to reinstate Schaefer's ministerial credentials after a trial court defrocked the Pennsylvania pastor last year.

Schaefer appealed and was reinstated by a vote of a regional court, the Northeastern Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals. At that time, Schaefer said: "I will not refuse ministry to anyone. I will never be silent again. I will always speak for my LGBTQ brothers and sisters."

In the ruling released October 27, the church's top court upheld Schaefer's appeal while acknowledging "some within the church do not support this outcome today," according to United Methodist News Service.

Others are celebrating. Reconciling Ministries Network executive director Matt Berryman said in a press release that it was "a step on the journey toward justice" for a church that "still has a long way to go."

Schaefer, formerly pastor of Zion United Methodist Church of Iona in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, has since moved to the UMC's California-Pacific Conference, where he is assigned to a ministry in Santa Barbara. —Cathy Lynn Grossman, Religion News Service

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, November 30

Isaiah 64:1–9; 1 Corinthians 1:3–9; Mark 13:24–37

FOR YEARS, whenever I encountered a biblical text about God's anger, I ignored it. I kept reading until I found something I liked, something about God's love, forgiveness, and grace.

When I became a pastor, this practice went into high gear. I ignored every verse mentioning God's wrath or judgment. I didn't want to scare my parishioners away.

No one likes the thought of an angry God. Yet God's wrath keeps popping up all over the Bible, including in this week's Advent readings. Isaiah 64:5 addresses God: "You were angry when we sinned; you hid yourself when we did wrong" (CEB).

Obviously this is an Old Testament verse. When I tell people that I teach Old Testament at a seminary, they sometimes reply, "I just like the loving God of the New Testament so much more than the angry God of the Old Testament." If this week's texts were the only glimpses we had of God, this characterization would seem quite accurate. The Isaiah text contrasts sharply with 1 Corinthians' talk of grace, peace, spiritual gifts, and receiving God's strength.

However, these texts are only pieces of a larger whole. When we read the Bible closely, we also see the Old Testament God offering forgiveness and the New Testament God acting in anger. The Old Testament's God is "a merciful and compassionate God, very patient, full of faithful love, and willing not to destroy." That's in Jonah, when God has just forgiven the Assyrians—people known for brutality and for conquering the people of Israel. In the New Testament, we find references to hell, to weeping and gnashing of teeth, and to a hot-headed preacher from Nazareth who insulted the cool, calm religious leaders of his day. Relegating divine wrath to the Old Testament and divine mercy to the New requires ignoring much of each.

I can see why people want to distance themselves from ideas of divine wrath, though. It's hard enough to deal with an angry person. An angry God sounds unbearable. We remain haunted by the idea of a divine anger as all-powerful as God, by Jonathan Edwards's words in "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God": God "will know that you can't bear the Weight of Omnipotence treading upon you, yet he won't regard that, but he will crush you under his Feet without Mercy; he'll crush out your Blood, and make it fly."

Who wants anything to do with that kind of God? In *Faith No More*, Phil Zuckerman describes how many people grew up in strict religious homes where they learned about hell and God's anger. As adults, thoughts of God's anger kept tormenting them until things finally reached a breaking point, and they

gave up on religion altogether. Is there anything redemptive about an angry God?

One of my students works with troubled youth who have been removed from their homes. When he tried talking about God's love with a teenager who suffered terribly growing up, his words meant absolutely nothing. The boy replied, "If God is love, then why did that stuff happen?" Later, my student tried a new tactic. He told the teen that God was fiercely angry with the person who harmed him. Suddenly, the boy wanted to listen, to know more. For the first time, something about Christianity made sense.

Martin Luther King said that the greatest tragedy of his day wasn't that bad people did terrible things. It was that good people did nothing in the face of grave injustices. The biblical God refuses to do nothing. Our God opposes all who harm other human beings or creation. Our God grows angry when children suffer, when people live in mansions while others are homeless, when corporations pollute God's beautiful world.

A God who responds to evil with nothing more than calm I-love-you's: that's the very definition of an evil deity. If our theology is going to work amid the rubble of Gaza, the beheadings in Iraq, and those gunned down by racism, then it needs a God capable of growing angry. There's a reason that God tells Pharaoh, "Let my people go!" instead of "I love you."

An important part of Advent is preparing for the day when God will ask what we did with our lives, what we did with our resources, and what we did with this world. As the Mark text hints (see verses 32–37), one real possibility is that God will be angry. God has given us responsibility for this world, and God expects us to take good care of it. The worst thing imaginable is having nothing good to say when God asks us how we've tended to the world and its poor.

But before we take that thought in Jonathan Edwards's direction, we need to remember that the Bible says repeatedly that God is slow to anger. It says that God's more concerned about an entire society bent toward greed than a single person missing the mark. It says that in God we can find abundant mercy, forgiveness, and hope.

But this idea—that God is slow to anger—also means that things can reach a breaking point. Evil can pile up so high that God, along with anyone else with half a conscience, becomes enraged.

I'm older now than when I used to ignore what the Bible says about God's anger. I've gained some knowledge of suffering and injustice. I've learned that sometimes terrible things happen, and every earthly indication is that evildoers will get away scot-free. Biblical texts about a righteous God growing angry offer me hope. They suggest that a day will come when the world will be set aright—that I can let go of my own anger, because God can get plenty angry when necessary.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, December 7

2 Peter 3:8–15a

AS AN Old Testament professor, I spend my days thinking about the religious lives of people 2,500 years ago. Sometimes I stop and wonder what people 2,500 years in the future will think of the church today.

My hunch is that they'll say we lost sight of holiness. They'll find very few sermons on this topic. They'll see how run-down our churches are, or how new ones resemble gymnasiums, and they'll conclude that our church buildings rarely communicated that God is actually worthy of worship. They'll say that Christians took their priorities from political parties, not from the Bible. They'll say that for our generation, holiness seemed like a rather abstract concept, nothing we tried to embody, hardly the first thing that came to our minds when we thought about God.

This week's text from 2 Peter presents a very different perspective. Like many Advent texts, it describes the day of the Lord, a time when "the elements will melt away with the flames" and "everything will be destroyed." The author then poses a question: "What sort of people ought you to be?" The answer makes no reference to being nice or loving: "You must live holy and godly lives" (CEB).

The Bible uses words like *holy* more than words like *love*. Yet *holiness* is a murky word. It evokes several ideas.

First, when something is holy, it belongs to God. The Old Testament calls the temple "the holy place" because it is God's home. Sacrifices were holy because they were God's food: meals shared between God and the people making the offering. People were holy when they acted like they belonged to God.

Second, when something is holy, it's complete. It has integrity; it's darn near perfect. It belongs to God—and God wants the very best. The cinnamon rolls that just came out of the oven, not the ones we forgot about in the back of the fridge. The crisp \$100 bills at the start of the month, not the tattered singles we still have at the end of our pay period. The times when we're alert and full of life, not the glassy-eyed moments when we feel compelled to check our smartphones yet again.

Third, when something's holy, it's beautiful. If the ancient Israelites had worn socks, the temple would have knocked them off. It was a palace. When you entered, it was as if you were returning to the Garden of Eden, back in paradise. You were surrounded by pillars, colorful linens with rich embroidery, and decorations made with gold and silver and copper.

The temple spoke loud and clear: God is here. God is holy. God is beautiful. God is greater than we ever could be. God is worthy of our worship.

Fourth, when something's holy, it's pure. People today associate purity with sexual matters, but biblical purity includes daily matters like cleanliness and food. For biblical Israelites, personal hygiene was a sacrament: you cleaned yourself before going to the temple as a reminder that God is pure and good, different from everyday clutter, dirt, and disease. Every meal was also a sacrament. You ate only those foods considered clean, as an act of devotion, a reminder to watch what you do with your body. The New Testament picks up on these ideas, associating purity with innocence.

Finally, when something's holy, it's set apart. People in the Bible set themselves apart by resisting the temptation to follow other gods. Most of us aren't tempted to bow down before literal idols. Yet we are called to work against the rampant forces of greed, lust, gluttony, and violence in our day. Why? Because as 2 Peter puts it, "We are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness is at home."

The author here draws on one of my favorite passages, Isaiah 65:17–25, which talks of a time when God will change the world as we know it, bringing us back to Eden. Rejoicing will abound, while weeping will vanish. Homelessness will be a thing of the past. People will enjoy fresh fruit. Suffering will disappear. God will be at home with God's people, and all the animals of Eden will dwell together in safety.

To prepare ourselves for that happy day, we seek holiness now. Not the stuffy, self-righteous holiness that says, "Admire me and my religiosity." But the beautiful, dazzling holiness that makes us feel at home in God's presence.

It's hard to find people today who are even aware of holiness in this sense, much less people who order their lives around it. But I think of my friend Ellen. She gave up her time to mentor me when she could have easily stuck to her own important projects. When I talk with her, I walk away feeling like a better person. I think that Ellen has figured out what holiness is all about. She lives like she belongs to God. She sacrifices good things to God and others. She surrounds herself with beauty. She has no problem going in a different direction from the rest of society.

Her holiness doesn't make me feel bad for my lack of holiness. It's contagious.

The author is Matthew Schlimm, assistant professor of Old Testament at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. His newest book is This Strange and Sacred Scripture: Wrestling with the Old Testament and Its Oddities, forthcoming from Baker Academic.

The war against rest

by Benjamin J. Dueholm

MARIA FERNANDES died for the sake of a nap. The 32-year-old held three part-time jobs, and between shifts at two different Dunkin' Donuts locations she stopped in a parking lot in Elizabeth, New Jersey, to sleep in her car. Fumes from a spilled fuel container that had tipped over—she worried about running out of gas—and exhaust from her vehicle ended her life on August 25. According to her manager, this was the first time Fernandes failed to show up or answer her phone. Her friends remembered a generous, sentimental, spirited young woman.

Fernandes was part of what economist Joe Seneca calls the “real face of the recession”: 7.5 million American workers cobbling together a living from part-time jobs. While the shortage of full-time jobs at adequate wages is a familiar story in America's lingering downturn, the cruel shortage of sleep is not.

It should be. “A battle against leisure is unfolding,” Ryan Jacob claims in a *Pacific Standard* article called, provocatively enough, “Are Sundays Dying?” Citing Canadian survey data, Jacob found that even in this last citadel of repose, religious observances, socializing, eating at home, and, yes, sleep had all declined on Sundays between 1981 and 2005. During the same period, time spent working increased dramatically.

Churches have, in a manner of speaking, taken notice. Late rising and the newspaper, once the frequently cited competitors to Sunday worship, have been replaced with youth sports leagues. But sports are only part of the story. Rest is leaking out of the world through work, too. Maria Fernandes died after a Sunday night graveyard shift. An online fund-raiser covered her burial expenses.

In recent years, there has been a swell of interest in sabbath observance among American Christians. The influential 1997 collection *Practicing Our Faith* included Dorothy Bass's essay on sabbath, while Ched Myers's 2001 book *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics* highlighted the communal dimensions of the practice. More recently, MaryAnn McKibben Dana's *Sabbath in the Suburbs* (2012) addressed the practical realities of sabbath observance, while Walter Brueggemann's *Sabbath as Resistance* (2014) interpreted the sabbath command as central to the economic ethic of the Old Testament and of Christianity, in sharp contrast to the unceasing economic demands of other ideologies. This summer, *Christianity Today* published a series on the sabbath. This renaissance in sabbath-keeping—or more precisely in the idea of it—is a welcome corrective to the accusation of legalism or ritual formality that has

long haunted Christian discussion of the (characteristically Jewish) sabbath.

But this revival focuses, perhaps inevitably, on the family, the home, and the sacred community as the place in which the gift of the sabbath is received. Even Brueggemann, despite his consistent economic focus, laments that “‘soccer practice’ invades the rest of the day” and calls on Christians to resist the “seductions” of an exploitative world “by discipline, by resolve,

The concept of sabbath is being eroded in every aspect of life.

by baptism, by Eucharist, and by passion.” In other words, this sabbath revival is a renewal of sabbath piety, and a needed and welcome one. It's no substitute, however, for direct engagement with sabbath politics.

The war on leisure, after all, extends beyond Sunday. Commerce and work, and the political power that gathers around them, are eroding the concept of sabbath—of divinely ordained rest—in every aspect of life. The erosion of idleness is active just below the surface of many of our policy debates over work, family, and retirement.

The current debate over the minimum wage—President Obama and several state-level officials are trying to increase it—is ultimately about whether workers ought to have time for anything but work. Working 40 hours a week at minimum wage doesn't provide enough income to meet the basic necessities of life, especially for a family. Some defend this state of affairs on the assumption that minimum wage workers are young and still dependent on parents for housing and health insurance. But if this was ever the case, it isn't anymore. According to the Economic Policy Institute, 28 percent of minimum wage workers have children, more than half work full time, and nearly nine out of ten are over the age of 20.

The idea that the price of labor should be allowed to fall below the cost of life's necessities is, among other things, anti-

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thetical to the ethics of the Old Testament. It is of course possible to work more than full-time to make ends meet, and many people do just that, including Los Angeles school custodian Raul Meza. But this can only be tolerated if we believe human life is meant to serve labor markets and not vice versa. “When I think about making \$15 an hour,” Meza writes in the *Washington Post*, “I think mostly of the time that money could buy with my son.” (Theoretically, there are other policy solutions here besides minimum wage increases, such as the universal basic income proposed by policy wonks on the right and left alike.)

Meanwhile, wage and hour laws are becoming ever less relevant to a workforce increasingly composed of freelancers, contractors, the self-employed, the exempt salaried, and the adjunct. According to one estimate, fully a third of the U.S. workforce operates at least partly on a freelance basis. Then there are the workers improperly classified as independent contractors by employers who want to avoid paying payroll taxes and benefits. And for salaried workers in the “knowledge economy”—however well or reliably paid—work can break into life anywhere, at any time, and without notice. Of course, socializing, shopping, or screwing around online while at work—something Brigid Schulte memorably calls “crappy little bits of leisure-time confetti”—are easier now, too. Continual idleness and continual effort alike now require great patience and deliberateness.

The war on leisure is shaping family policy as well. The United States is currently the only developed country that does not guarantee paid parental leave to workers. Last year a bill was introduced in Congress that would have provided up to 12 weeks of partially paid medical and parental leave. It was promptly stymied by ferocious resistance from business lob-

bies. Local and state laws providing paid sick leave to workers have been prevented or repealed after intense lobbying (and campaign contributions) from business groups.

Even the appallingly modest legal protections for pregnant workers do not operate as intended. A recent spate of terrifying complaints against Walmart—the nation’s largest private employer—for mistreatment of pregnant employees forced even that famously hardline company to make some small (but

In our pursuit of economic growth, we risk losing something essential.

highly touted) changes to its policies. And Walmart is not alone; the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has found that violations of laws protecting pregnant workers fall most heavily on those in lower-wage industries. In today’s politics, when the interests of family conflict with the demands of employers, the family tends to lose.

Even the unending debate over the Affordable Care Act has been shaped by this conviction that work, and not family life, is an end in itself. When the Congressional Budget Office found that the ACA’s subsidies for individual health insurance would allow some people to work fewer hours or even retire without waiting till they were eligible for Medicare, opponents cited this as evidence of “job loss.” But it wasn’t an elimination of jobs the CBO was forecasting; it was highlighting, rather, the link between full-time work and health insurance and noting that the security of affordable health insurance would allow

people to shift from paid work to rearing children or simply relaxing after decades in the workforce. Astonishingly, this was treated as a looming disaster.

Finally, retirement itself is under attack. Public pensions are being cut dramatically, often in states governed by Democrats. Proposals to cut back on Medicare's guarantee of health coverage for senior citizens are a perennial feature of the budget proposals by House budget chair Paul Ryan. In budget negotiations with the House, President Obama repeatedly offered a new way to calculate Social Security benefits that would, over time, substantially reduce the retirement income of low- and middle-income Americans. (He was, thankfully, unable to make such a deal.)

The appeal of entitlement reform to centrist politicians, editorial writers, and advocacy groups like the Peterson Institute and Fix the Debt is, thus far, lost on the electorate at large. But it won't go away, in part because it is based on a compelling half truth. We must cut Medicare and Social Security, the story

goes, because if we don't, rising health-care costs and an aging population will overwhelm the federal budget. The second part is certainly correct. But if we don't do something about our aging population—by encouraging fertility and/or allowing more immigration—our whole economy will be in trouble, not just the federal budget. And if we don't find a way to reduce health-care costs overall, cutting Medicare will only shift those costs onto families.

The result in either case is the same. People will have to spend more of their lives in the labor market and less caring for grandchildren, watching the sunrise, or running the church altar guild.

There is, it must be conceded, a compelling reason for the war on leisure. Forcing people to work more will, in general,

We need a commitment to life as its own rationale and form of wealth.

In the receiving line after worship

In the receiving line after worship an elderly man wants to tell me about his hydrangeas. They were gorgeous last summer, he says, but not as splendid

as in 1972 when the blue ribbon at the state fair went to his wife who, he reminds me, was Miss Butts County back in the 1950s and whom he still misses

every day, especially when he eats peach jam on his toast which is almost every morning except Tuesdays when the VFW guys get together down at the café.

The people behind him in line shift on their feet and glance at their watches while he, oblivious to their impatience, goes on to describe for me (in detail)

the attributes of her winning Lemon Zest Mophead, which he swears was the size of a dinner plate, or maybe a large salad plate. The hydrangea story is taking forever

and I feel my own agitation rising, until the moment I take his hand in mine (a gesture of care but also, I regret now to say, meant to hurry him along) and I feel

his papery fingers which are not at all like a hydrangea but rather like a maple leaf in November, all that lush, green vigor stored deep within itself

just before it releases the limb and is airborne at last, carried on a breath, caught up in the glory of all created things, its final fluttering an ovation of praise.

Julie Pennington-Russell

lead to greater economic growth. In that sense, what Brueggemann calls the gods of the commodity economy have been productive, if also cruelly demanding. A person who is sleeping or having sex or cooking dinner for friends or singing a hymn is not doing anything to increase the GDP.

But in the single-minded pursuit of economic growth, we risk losing something essential to human life. In the case of the week, it is what scholars of religion have called the "sanctification of time," the punctuation of the ordinary with the special. In the case of family leave and retirement, it is the "sanctification of life," the idea that conditions such as pregnancy and childbirth, sickness, and old age are to be honored for their own sake. Honoring time and life comes with a dollars-and-cents cost, compensated primarily by spiritual and cultural benefits—benefits our politics aren't good at recognizing or protecting.

At the heart of the matter is the sabbath itself. Fore-shadowed in the creation story, God's command to rest sets Israel apart from the Exodus onward. It is a costly command. The people, their foreign residents, and even the animals must rest. The land must rest. The widow must be released from her debt—at least for the length of a night's sleep—and from the incessant demand to work in repaying it. Isaiah rails against the abuse of the sabbath to gain competitive advantage, which undermines the ability of anyone to enjoy rest. This mandated idleness—15 percent of life—was so costly that it had to be general and it had to be enforced with fierce penalties. But these costs all underscore the drastic, unyielding, world-shaking claim that life—even the life of an ox—is in some sense its own end and not an instrument. Idleness is sacred in the Bible because it identifies the world with a living God whose greatest gift is rest and who rescued the people from slavery in a land where no rest was allowed.

"The Sabbath of God is the full return to him of all creatures," writes Maximus the Confessor, identifying union with God as a kind of rest. It's a common identification, in the Bible and beyond. Christians transferred the sabbath to Sunday and then argued over the relative places of ritual observance and public amusement. But the heart of the command was still honored. The gradual abolition of debtors' prisons and indentured servitude, the imposition of wage and hour laws and the provision of basic needs at public expense—all this grew from the economics of the sabbath. This reduced the value of debts and increased the value of labor.

"The Sabbath," writes Abraham Joshua Heschel, "is a day for the sake of life." And this tradition—Heschel calls it a "palace in time"—that Judaism fought so hard to preserve set up outposts in the rest of life.

These outposts are what the war on leisure is dismantling. And churches—by hoping, urging, or demanding that the faithful cut back on their commitment to travel hockey leagues—risk becoming mere bystanders. The ethos of the sabbath goes much deeper than an individual commitment to prioritize

worship. It includes all of those sacred practices, both affirmations and prohibitions, that have been kept alive in Judaism and are being fitfully recovered by Christians. It includes consciously embodying an alternative to the jealous ideologies of modern life—starting, perhaps, with sleep itself.

It will take more than individual piety for us to avoid permanent exile from time's palace. We will need a sabbath politics and a sabbath advocacy. We will need a commitment to life as its own rationale, its own form of wealth, its own glory.

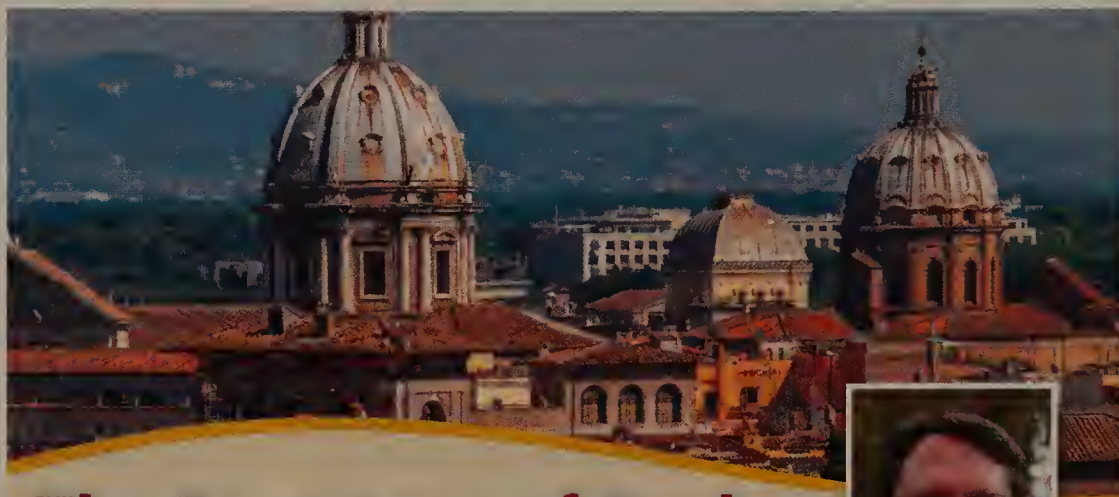
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Religious freedom expert Brent Walker

The court after *Hobby Lobby*

J. BRENT WALKER is executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, an organization committed to “defending the free exercise of religion and protecting against its establishment by government.” Walker routinely speaks in churches, educational institutions, and denominational gatherings. He has a law degree from Stetson University College of Law and an M.Div. degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Since 2003, Walker has also served as an adjunct professor at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

The contraceptive mandate in the Affordable Care Act and the Supreme Court’s ruling last summer in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* seem to have opened up a new stream of religious liberty cases. Do you expect to see a variety of cases making their way to the Supreme Court in which a for-profit employer claims an exemption on religious freedom grounds to an otherwise neutral law? Or will Justice Samuel Alito’s dictum that *Hobby Lobby* is just about the contraceptive mandate prove correct?

By holding that corporations are within the statute’s coverage of “person,” the *Hobby Lobby* decision does open the door for additional claims to be brought by for-profit employers. However, in no way does that mean that the claims will be successful.

The court’s opinion purports to be, and was, specific to the claim of *Hobby Lobby*, a “closely held” corporation, and its objection to the contraceptive mandate under the Affordable Care Act. Of course, religious freedom claims involving blood transfusions and vaccinations have been brought in the past, but by individuals and religious organizations. The court’s opinion applies only to a “closely held corporation,” a term which will have to be further defined in the future.

Justice Anthony Kennedy’s concurring opinion is critical here. His was the vote that turned a potential plurality of four into a majority of five. He took the time to write separately, emphasizing the narrow nature of the court’s opinion. The need for Justice Kennedy’s fifth vote for any viable court majority in the future would likely temper extensions of the *Hobby Lobby* holding beyond the context of its own limited terms.

How does this legal discussion of religious exemptions affect cases involving LGBT people? Will religious liberty be invoked in order to accommodate religious objections to gay marriage, for example?

First, it is clear that churches and houses of worship, and perhaps other pervasively religious organizations, will not have to condone or participate in same-sex marriages to the extent they violate their sincerely held religious beliefs.

However, there have been and will continue to be religious

“Religious liberty claims will continue to be made about same-sex marriages.”

liberty claims made by individuals in businesses, sometimes incorporated, who are involved in the periphery of the marriage ceremony. These would include, for example, the baker who makes the wedding cake, florists who supply flowers, photographers who take pictures of the ceremony and the reception, and clothiers who rent tuxedos.

Some argue that these folks, already engaged in the stream of commerce, should not be able to decline to provide these goods and services based on religious objections. Others say that, particularly after *Hobby Lobby*, there can be a burden on the exercise of religion even in businesses operating in the corporate form in the marketplace. Others have suggested a more moderated approach in which these businesses should be afforded religious liberty protection to the extent they are arguably being required to somehow participate in the ceremony (e.g., photographer, musicians), but those that are primarily selling or renting goods in the marketplace (e.g., baker, clothier) should not be able to make such a claim.

So yes, religious liberty claims will continue to be asserted in connection with same-sex marriages. It’s important to



note that religious liberty claims are being asserted on behalf of churches and religious organizations that *desire* to solemnize same-sex marriages and have them be sanctioned by the state.

For example, earlier this year, the United Church of Christ—accompanied by the Alliance of Baptists and several ministers from various faith traditions—filed a lawsuit against the state of North Carolina, challenging the constitutionality of a state law prohibiting same-sex marriage with the allegation that it violates their religious freedom.

How plausible is the UCC argument in that case?

So far, successful challenges to bans on same-sex marriage have been brought under the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause and analogous state provisions. Challenges based on religious liberty claims are unusual.

If the rather ambiguous North Carolina law is interpreted to criminalize acts of religious worship that simply sanctify same-sex marriage in the churches’ eyes, the law is clearly unconstitutional. If it is interpreted just to forbid the churches from purporting to perform a civil same-sex ceremony, the claim is still plausible but the outcome less certain.

Right now, a religious institution that receives federal funds cannot discriminate on the basis of race. Can it discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or practice? Will the courts be compelled to address the question of whether sexual orientation is a protected class?

Federal contractors who receive federal funds cannot discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or national origin. Many individuals and organizations, including the Baptist Joint Committee, have argued that while religious organizations are perfectly free to discriminate on the basis of religion in hiring when using their own funds, they should not be able to do so when receiving government funds.

In 2002, President George W. Bush issued an executive order permitting religious organizations to use religious criteria to discriminate in federally funded programs and positions. Although Barack Obama promised to reverse the Bush executive order during his 2008 campaign and ban religious discrimination in hiring in federally funded positions and programs, he has not done so. While the executive order that President Obama signed in July added “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to the list of protect-

ed categories for federal contractors, he did not reverse the Bush policy on religious organizations discriminating on the basis of religion.

The Supreme Court said that a closely held company like Hobby Lobby does have religious standing and religious rights. Is that definition workable? At what point does a for-profit company lose its religious identity? Is it a question of company size or mode of ownership?

The phrase “closely held company” does not have a uniform—or sometimes even precise—legal meaning. Generally, it is thought to include companies that are not publicly traded and which are owned exclusively or primarily by one family or a small group of like-minded persons. The Obama administration has proposed a rule to provide a definition for for-profit entities that qualify for closely held status, and it is soliciting comments from the public to help it make that decision.

Certainly, the *Hobby Lobby* decision contemplates “closely held” going beyond what are traditionally thought of as mom-and-pop operations. These are usually small family businesses that, although incorporated, are run more like sole proprietorships and hire few if any additional employees. The court regards the idea of “closely held” to be far more expansive when it applied the term to Hobby Lobby, which has more than 550 stores nationwide.

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The contraception cases are striking in that third parties—those receiving insurance—are so closely involved. These cases seem to pit one person's religious freedom against another's freedom from religion. Is that a fair way to state it?

Yes, the effect on third parties must be part of the religious liberty calculus. Many religious liberty exemptions and accommodations will benefit the religious practitioner but have absolutely no effect at all on the rights or well-being of third parties. Those are easier cases. Where the rights and well-being of third parties are involved, the court must balance those rights in the equation.

The court, for example, struck down a state law in the case of *Estate of Thornton v. Caldor, Inc.* (1985) that gave workers an absolute right to have their sabbath accommodated in the workplace, because the law would effectively require other workers to bear the burden covering the accommodated workers' shifts. In *Cutter v. Wilkinson* (2005), the court reaffirmed this prohibition of forcing third parties to share the burden of cost of someone else's religious choices.

In *Hobby Lobby*, the court's majority, instead of balancing the interest of workers in having contraception coverage, assumed there was a compelling governmental interest in the government providing coverage but ruled that it could be done a less restrictive way. The court held that the

accommodation the federal government had already provided for religiously affiliated nonprofits could be provided here to both protect the conscience of the for-profit owners and extend the protection of the Affordable Care Act to third-party employees.

Moreover, Justice Kennedy in his concurring opinion was more attentive than the majority opinion to the need to protect the rights of third parties. After noting the importance of the accommodation of religion in our religiously plural culture, he stated firmly that the accommodation may not “unduly restrict other persons, such as employees, in protecting their own interests, interests the law deems compelling.”

The court said that it decided *Hobby Lobby* on the assumption that the government has a compelling interest in public health. That would seem like an important claim. Is that how you read it?

For the purposes of the *Hobby Lobby* decision, the court's majority “assumed”—but *explicitly did not hold*—that the government has a compelling interest in providing the contraceptive services to women at no cost. So, in later cases—which could include other challenges to the contraceptive mandate—the court may deny the compelling interest it “assumes” in this case.



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Precedent says that laws can be challenged if they impose a “substantial burden” on religious practice. What constitutes “substantial” according to precedent? Did *Hobby Lobby* declare that paying indirectly for insurance that includes contraception is indeed a substantial burden on religious practice? Is a burden judged substantial simply because the plaintiff says it is?

There is no precise definition of *substantial*. That word was inserted into the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to intensify the burden requirement. A burden might be regarded as the government somehow pressuring religious choices one way or another. The degree of pressure and con-

“We don’t want courts making hard and fast decisions about theology.”

sequent substantiality depends upon the facts and circumstances of the case as interpreted by the court on a case-by-case basis.

Courts will usually defer to the claimant and take the claimant’s word for the question of whether there is a burden. Certainly we don’t want courts making hard and fast decisions about theology and dogma. However, courts must draw lines when it comes to gauging substantiality.

Here, even assuming that the Affordable Care Act’s contraceptive mandate burdened the Hobby Lobby owners’ religious beliefs and practices, the argument is that there are so many intervening acts that the employee’s ultimate decision about whether to use contraception services is too far removed from the religious objection to make the burden substantial. In other words, a corporation’s payment of premiums (which is not a payment by the religious shareholders themselves) to an insurance company that will then cover a full range of medical services while the employee makes her own independent determination about whether to use contraception has too attenuated a connection to religious belief and practice to “substantially burden” an owner’s exercise of religion.

The court’s decision in *Hobby Lobby* was somewhat confused by its ruling regarding Wheaton College. In the latter case, the court said that the college, as a religious entity, was not compelled even to apply for an exemption from the ACA mandate, whereas in *Hobby Lobby* the Court said that applying for an exemption was the preferred solution for those who object. What is going on?

Yes, this is somewhat confusing. From the very beginning, explicitly religious organizations, such as churches, were exempted entirely from the contrac-

tive mandate. Later on, religiously affiliated nonprofits, such as hospitals, charities, and schools, were given an accommodation that would allow them to opt out of providing contraception coverage they find objectionable by signing a form and providing it to the insurer or their third-party administrator. After receiving the notification, the insurer or third-party administrator would provide the contraception coverage to employees. Up until the *Hobby Lobby* decision, for-profit businesses were neither exempted from nor accommodated by the mandate.

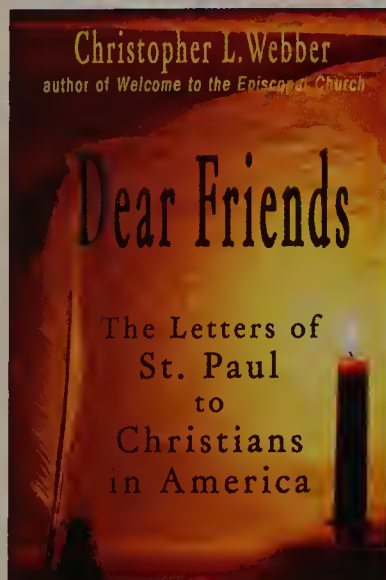
The court in *Hobby Lobby* suggested this accommodation, previously given to religiously affiliated nonprofits, is a less restrictive alternative that would both protect the conscience of the *Hobby Lobby* owners and extend the protection of the Affordable Care Act to the third-party employees at no cost to the employer.

Then, a few days after the *Hobby Lobby* decision, the Supreme Court temporarily granted Wheaton College the ability to opt out of providing insurance coverage for contraception it finds objectionable without signing the form to do so. (The college claimed that even signing the form and submitting it to Wheaton’s third-party administrator, which then must provide the services at no cost to its employees, would make Wheaton complicit in the transaction.)

But it’s important to note that the court’s order was only provisional, not a final decision on the merits. It strains credulity to believe that a majority of the justices would say that the existing nonprofit accommodation is a linchpin in its decision in *Hobby Lobby* and then turn around and deny its constitutionality as applied to Wheaton College and other religiously affiliated nonprofits. I think it would be extremely unlikely that Justice Kennedy would go along with that.

In the aftermath of the court’s temporary injunction for Wheaton, the administration has proposed regulations with an alternative opt-out method for religious nonprofits: they must notify the Department of Health and Human Services of their religious objection, and the government will then notify the insurer or third-party administrator who will be responsible for providing the coverage at no cost to employees. CC

—David Heim



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Narcissism is normal

by Eric Miller

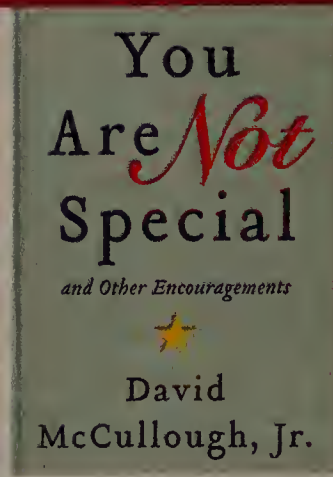
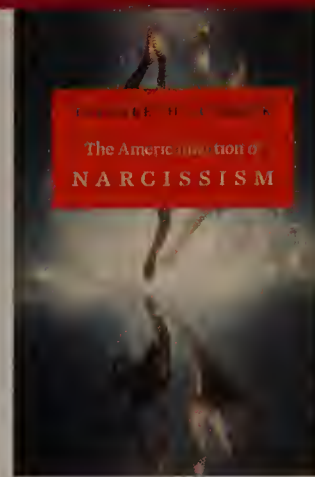
THE QUESTION OF whether we once again find ourselves in an age of narcissism," Elizabeth Lunbeck observes, "has recently captured public attention." As if on cue, David McCullough Jr. warns of the "swelling narcissism" besetting kids these days. His book is the expanded edition of a commencement address he gave in 2012 at Wellesley High School in Massachusetts, where he teaches English. "You are not special," he managed to say, in varying wry ways, nine times in a 12-minute address. The video went viral; McCullough inked a book deal; and Lunbeck no doubt looks on with bemusement.

So does McCullough, one senses. Drolly teasing, gently beseeching—a dead ringer in style and voice for NBC's Brian Williams—McCullough exudes affection for his students and enthusiasm for his calling. If he's crotchety, he's crotchety-cool. Having taught for 26 years and fathered four children, he's lived some history (and as the son of the historian David McCullough, has presumably read some, too).

Circled up daily with his students, he finds that many "are suffering from (or rather enjoying) inflated notions of themselves and regard every opportunity as theirs for the asking, every accolade their due." These young people "feel neither indulged nor directed nor dependent. Nor, for that matter, fretful, naive, self-absorbed, or soft. What they feel is *perfectly normal*." He directs the brunt of his charge not at the students but at their parents, whose way of life and manner of child-rearing have taught kids that "me, me, me is the refrain" they should sing.

McCullough's understanding of narcissism is one that has over the past 50 years worked its way into the argot of America's professional classes: narcissism as a self-endangering and community-denying preoccupation with self. To raise a narcissist is in our day no parent's idea of success. So behold the irony: those who universally declare narcissism a deadly sin are the perpetrators of its universal triumph. We disdain narcissism and yield narcissists.

It's an angle on our age that Lunbeck, a historian at Vanderbilt University, finds blinding. She seeks to restore vision by telling the story behind a widely held—and culturally disabling—conceptual error: a faulty clinical definition of narcissism, which influential intellectuals propounded to a listening public. By correcting their mistaken understanding, Lunbeck hopes we might finally grasp not narcissism's danger but its promise.



The Americanization of Narcissism

By Elizabeth Lunbeck

Harvard University Press, 384 pp., \$35.00

You Are Not Special . . . and Other Encouragements

By David McCullough Jr.

Ecco, 352 pp., \$21.99

For Lunbeck, Freud's seminal writings, born in the scientific milieu of the turn of the 20th century, laid out an intolerably fatalistic vision of psychic turmoil, conflict, and repression. However brilliant his signature constructs, they had little chance, in Lunbeck's view, of revealing more hopeful dimensions of human experience: innate promise, for instance, and harmonic possibility. The theorists and practitioners who followed faithfully in Freud's train—the so-called orthodox lineage—tended if anything, she charges, to render Freud's dark analysis with yet more severity.

From beginning to end Lunbeck tenaciously goes after the most influential of the orthodox intellectuals, Christopher Lasch, aiming for a splashy takedown. Lasch's 1979 bestseller *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* won him an audience with President Carter and an interview in that bastion of social criticism, *People* magazine. Steeped in Freud and speaking a distinctive variant of neo-Marxism, Lasch rendered his judgment on the American circumstance with a melding of scholarly style and prophetic verve rarely found in American social criticism. Many felt enough curiosity, concern, or confusion to check it out.

Narcissism for Lasch (at this time) was most fundamentally the psychic malformation that capitalism, with its expansive force, was inescapably afflicting on the (erstwhile) citizenry. Through its disruption of parental authority, the political economy of corporate capitalism decimated the intensive family dynamics that alone could defeat the domination of narcissistic impulses within any person.

Lasch's use of psychoanalytic theory was, crucially, a buttress for his larger analysis of "the culture of competitive indi-

Eric Miller teaches at Geneva College. He is the author of *Hope in a Scattering Time: A Life of Christopher Lasch and Glimpses of Another Land: Political Hopes, Spiritual Longing*.

vidualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of narcissistic preoccupation with the self." For Lasch this narcissistic devolution revealed itself in sector after sector of contemporary life, from the relations between the sexes to views of death. The book was sharp, impassioned, and bracingly prophetic.

Lunbeck will have none of it. *The Americanization of Narcissism* is in part an exposé that seeks to undo the harm that she thinks Lasch (and others in this lineage, primarily Daniel Bell and Philip Rieff) have caused. Lunbeck punches back with scorning ridicule, a scholarly harrumph aimed at what she contends are Lasch's mistaken appropriations of psychoanalytic theory, from Freud through his later interpreters, Otto Kernberg and Heinz Kohut. Lasch, she grants, was a "gifted polemicist." But he was fundamentally wrong in his understanding of narcissism and in his vision of America.

Lunbeck sees promise, not danger, in the culture's narcissistic trends.

Following the work of Kohut, Lunbeck contends that there is a "normal narcissism," fostered by steady parental affirmation and that it is "the wellspring of human ambition and creativity." Kohut and others argued (contra the orthodox Freudians) that "healthy societies were premised on the capacities of parents to nurture children's grandiosity and feed their self-esteem." While narcissists may in fact take destructive turns, they can also direct their outsized "ambition and creativity" toward great personal and public good. Lunbeck nods toward Steve Jobs as an example.

Thanks in part to the superior insights and influence of Kohut and friends, Americans in the last third of the 20th century began more fully to embrace this spirit of ego affirmation, of self-love, summed up in the single touchstone phrase *self-esteem*. To Lunbeck, the social gain has been significant—the psychoanalytic turn in Western culture eventually "would fuel various forms of identity politics, from black to women's to homosexual liberation." Despite what Lasch and other "Cassandras" were saying, things were getting better, not worse.

Lunbeck's book makes for a familiar variety of feel-good story: the seemingly wise are exposed as fools, and our way of life turns out to be better than we feared. But the exposé is not convincing.

Many of Lunbeck's readings of Lasch are implausible or just off—such as the claim that Lasch idealized "the imperial self of yesteryear," or that he sought to fortify patriarchy, or that by narcissism he meant something like "selfishness." Lasch was himself intensely communal,

both personally and politically, and he advocated egalitarian social arrangements of the sort that would enable both mother and father to center their lives on the home. While not denying the ubiquity of selfishness, he considered the value of the psychoanalytic tradition to lie in its ability to move beyond universalist conceptions of human behavior toward a more historically precise mode of insight.

The parts of Lunbeck's critique that ring truer center on the charge that Lasch in *Narcissism* was unable to sense genuine promise in what he and others denounced as the therapeutic turn in American culture. Lasch himself later came, with qualifications, to grant as much.

What is most disturbing, and in the end telling, is Lunbeck's bald depiction of Lasch as an amateur bumbler in his handling of psychoanalytic literature and theory. One would never know, reading Lunbeck, that many psychoanalysts praised his book, that in 1981 he gave the Sigmund Freud Lectures at the University of London, that he wrote the introduction for the English edition of the eminent psychoanalytic theorist Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel's *The Ego Ideal*, and that, in fact, he responded to many of the criticisms Lunbeck makes in his 1984 follow-up volume *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times*. Perhaps strangest of all, Lunbeck neglects to let the reader in on the curious fact that Lasch in *The Minimal Self* writes with deep sympathy for what he calls, in an inventive typology of current ideological alignments, "the party of Narcissus" (existing alongside the parties of the ego and superego).

Lasch, it turns out, kept reading in the face of his critics, who were indeed many. Through the writings of theorists like Chasseguet-Smirgel he refined his understanding of narcissism, placing increased emphasis on the promise, not simply the peril, of "primary narcissism," what in 1985 he described as "the infantile illusion of omnipotence and of the blissful feelings bound up with it." His thinking, in short, continued to evolve and deepen. A few years later he described narcissism as "not chiefly a sociological issue but as an existential, moral, and religious issue."

As such, it continued to help him understand what he persisted in declaring a historical reality: that in foundational ways

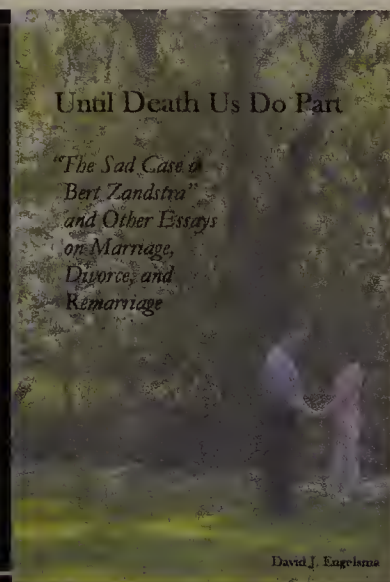
"Until Death Do Us Part"

By Prof. David J. Engelsma

One doctrine of marriage, and one only, guards the true church of Jesus Christ against every corruption of marriage and preserves the holy institution among the covenant people of God. Marriage is the intimate bond of love between one man and one woman for life.

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American civilization was not advancing but disintegrating, that real gains in some spheres were being more than offset by seismic shifts that registered their damage at the level of character. Although in *The Minimal Self* he contended that “the best hope for the future” lay in an array of radical movements he configured as the “party of Narcissus”—“the growing opposition to the nuclear arms race, the growing awareness of ecology, the growing criticism of consumerism and high technology, criticism of the ‘masculine’ psychology of conquest and competitive enterprise”—this party had emerged against the backdrop of palpable cultural devastation and bore its marks.

Among “the characteristic features” of the nation’s condition he included such tendencies as “our protective irony and emotional disengagement, our reluctance to make long-term emotional commitments, our sense of powerlessness and victimization, our fascination with extreme situations . . . our perception of large-scale organizations as systems of control.” The ever more extreme forms of individualistic liberation were symptoms not of freedom so much as of disorder—of a failure, or inability, to realize our own highest ideals.

Lunbeck and Lasch are at loggerheads—but not in their conceptions of narcissism. Rather, they are on different sides of a divide far more consequential, which lies beneath Lunbeck’s relentless hammering of Lasch: a difference over the defining of human ends and of the human prospect itself. Lunbeck’s enthusiasm for what Lasch 40 years ago began to call the “cultural left,” or “cultural radicalism,” is evident throughout; her book in fact might be read as a backstory of the liberationist trajectory of the past half century, crystallizing in the regnant psychological affirmation of “internal plenitude and abundance.” “Talk of self-esteem is not cause for alarm,” she reassures. The kids are, really, OK. And so are we.

But what of the observations of teachers like McCullough? Or what about the findings of sociologists like Christian Smith, who in his 2009 study of “emerging adults,” *Souls in Transition*, echoes many of McCullough’s judgments—that, in Smith’s words, the rising generation has difficulty seeing “an objective reality beyond the self” and seems to be “progressing yet further toward the nearly total submersion of self into fluidly constructed, private networks of technologically man-

aged intimates and associates”? A civic life and identity, concludes Smith, eludes most of them. For many it’s something they simply cannot imagine.

Lasch took such signs, many of which he noted well before his Freudian turn in the 1970s, to be symptoms of a culture—and people—in trouble. For a time psychoanalytic theory helped him to define and probe what he then called “the collapse of a common culture.” But by the 1980s he had begun to see the psychoanalytic tradition as inadequate and, if isolated as a self-contained line of inquiry, part of the problem. In a 1993

Lunbeck offers a backstory of the liberationist trajectory.

interview shortly before his death, he submitted that if psychoanalysis was “approached as a science or would-be science,” there was “nothing there.” Its value, rather, was in the way it “restates certain ancient religious insights in new form.” When it was “assimilated to a very old tradition of moral discourse, its real meaning begins to emerge.” He concluded in his last book that “at its best psychoanalytic theory exposes the moral and existential dimension of mental conflict, but even then it cannot compete with religion.” And psychoanalysis itself? “The more it infringes on the territory once occupied by religion, the more it invites unflattering comparisons with its rival.”

Among other things, religion provides access to a long tradition of inquiry into one of those ancient insights, which is also one of Lunbeck’s concerns: the centrality of love. Even the scientific, stoical Freud thought love necessary for aiding a suffering soul. “Our cures are cures of love,” he remarked (though he was referring to the love of the client for the analyst, not the opposite).

If a misunderstanding of narcissism can have the untoward consequences Lunbeck supposes, how much more a misapprehension of love? Love ill-defined cannot but diminish our prospects for the freedom for which we yearn, the freedom these authors in their varying ways sense we need.

What if love is not fundamentally an act of interpersonal affirmation, or a celebration of “internal plenitude and abundance,” as Lunbeck, reflecting the new common sense, has it? What if instead love is the final cause of the universe, expressed in creational structures that articulate an overarching telos and that inform our very essence? And what if it is to this creating love that we must turn if we are to realize finally our freedom?

This is what religion—Christian religion, anyway—teaches. It proffers a cosmology that transcends, without eclipsing, biology, offering insight into our condition and succor for our circumstance. If love so fathomed does indeed “move the sun and all the stars,” as one scholar of the soul concluded, it surely has the power, even in our restlessly secular age, to heal our afflictions and redirect our way.

CC

On the evening of that same day

Before the dust had settled from the tramping boots, he’d appeared. Eyes beheld him to their confusion but when he breathed upon them they remembered the spring green hills of Galilee, the cool evening air scented of olive, laurel, clematis, myrtle. A peace they could not reckon. A dove called.

Left to the silence, they could hardly recognize themselves. How strangely their voices sounded and what unlikely things they must have said.

Mark Goad

Faith MATTERS

by Samuel Wells

Dressed for the moment

AFTER SPENDING seven years in the American South swathed in Methodist and Baptist glories, I moved to London and changed my clothes. I resumed the practice of wearing a clerical collar.

Historically the collar was simply the dress of an educated man in society. Today it still tells the world you're an educated person. When I began in ordained ministry I was in a working-class parish in the northeast of England. In my first adult confirmation class there was a firefighter who told me how much he appreciated me wearing my collar when I visited him. I was surprised; I assumed he'd think I was being stiff and formal and unfriendly. "No," he said, "my supervisor at work often comes in to work at weekends when he doesn't have to, and he wears his casual clothes just to show that he can. So when I see you wearing your uniform I know you're taking me seriously."

Compare this to an experience ten years later in an underclass neighborhood. For several years I sat on the board of a group that sought to use local initiative to renew and invigorate the area. Because meetings were scheduled at various times, I'd turn up in whatever I happened to be wearing that day. Eventually one of the other board members, who like many of the board members was a local resident, said, "Please don't wear your collar to meetings. It feels like you're condemning us as sinners."

So the collar carries social power and spiritual power, and this can be helpful and unhelpful. And it carries sexual power too. Unattainability, spiritual permeability, discipline with a passionate underbelly: these qualities, whether existing in or projected onto the person in a collar, are the stuff of fantasy and longing and profound desire.

For all these reasons and more clergy may be reluctant to wear the collar. Clergy don't want to make someone feel small. They don't want to attract remarks from strangers and teenagers that seem to mock and provoke but are in fact telling these clergy something deeper—that they mock the collar because they feel that the God clergy represent isn't with them or on their side. Clergy don't want to seem to be super-holy persons who never thought a mean or greedy or lustful thought.

So why wear the collar? The collar says this one thing to parishioner and stranger alike: this conversation we're about to have, this conversation we're having, could be the most important one of your life. It doesn't have to be—I can laugh, I can relax, I can have fun, I can just be with you in joy or in sorrow. But it *can* be. It may not be the right time for you, but it's

always the right time for me. I will never tell you I'm too busy. I will never make light of your struggles. I will never tell you that something more interesting happened to me. I will never say, "I know," when you're exploring a feeling for the first time. I will never change the subject when you bring up something that's hard to hear.

I'll never do any of those things because all of them in different ways are saying, "I'm out of my depth." And what the collar is saying is, "I am someone who, however deep you wish to go, will never be out of my depth. You can trust me to listen. You can trust me to withhold my personal investment in the issues for another time and another place. You can trust me to be alert to the ways of God however strange the story you tell. You can trust me to know when some kind of specialized help may be in order. But you can also trust me to know that now could be the time for the moment of truth."

A month after my ordination as a deacon I made one of the biggest mistakes in ministry I've ever made. There was a gas

My collar says: our conversation could be very important.

explosion, and several parishioners were in the hospital on the other side of town. I didn't have a car so I took the bus each afternoon for a couple of weeks to make hospital visits. One afternoon I was getting off the bus and the driver asked me to wait a few moments until everyone else had gotten off at the last stop. He said, "Do you ever hear confessions?" I was very conscious that as a deacon I couldn't give absolution, so I asked where he lived and gave him the address of the priest in that parish.

What a fool I was. My clerical collar had done its work. A stranger realized what I did not—that the collar was saying, "I'm not out of my depth in any conversation you are called to have with me." But that afternoon I failed to live up to my collar. I was so worried about doing the right thing as far as procedures of church discipline that I couldn't see that here was a sinner who was asking to meet God, a prodigal who was running to come home to the Father. That bus driver wanted me to help him change his life. I forgot that in ministry the moment of truth could always be right now.

Samuel Wells is the vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London.

IN Review

Doctrine's many lives

by Sarah Morice Brubaker

Christine Helmer's important book has an unusual literary feature. Its titular character, Christian doctrine, is killed off not once, but twice. Or at least the death of doctrine is "twice pronounced," with each supposed death attracting a different set of coroners who ascribe its demise to very different causes.

Helmer chronicles two historical moments when it was declared that a theological strategy had sold Christian faith down the river and made doctrine impossible. But Helmer also argues persuasively for a different end to doctrine—end in the sense of "purpose." As long as its proper end is kept in sight, Helmer maintains, Christian doctrine will turn out to be resuscitatable, even vital.

The discussion of doctrine's purpose occupies the second part of the book. Prior to that, Helmer chronicles the two moments in Christian theology when doctrine's death was declared. The first time it was said to be Friedrich Schleiermacher's fault, and anyone who has spent time in Barthian or postliberal theology will be familiar with that particular postmortem account. Schleiermacher, we are meant to believe, put an end to Christian doctrine by turning it into a function of the individual's prelinguistic interiority, rather than of the biblical text. Theologians like Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, and George Lindbeck signed the arrest warrant and have duly held Schleiermacher's work in maximum-security confinement ever since.

Helmer, thankfully, is not content simply to rehearse the charges. With precision and charity, she questions the evidence against Schleiermacher, in the process relating a fascinating backstory

about how so many theologians came to blame him for doctrine's demise. The situation turns out to have been far more complex than Schleiermacher single-handedly selling the Christian faith down the river.

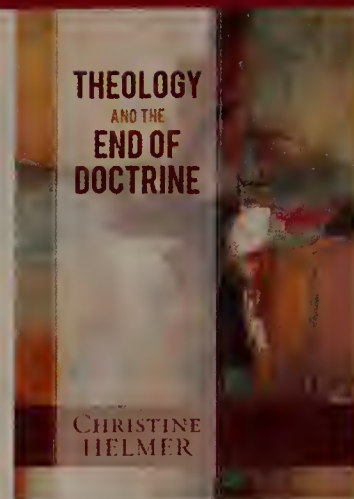
To give a far too brief account of a complicated story that is better told by Helmer herself, it begins with Martin Luther's understanding of righteousness, which was repositioned by 17th- and 18th-century Lutheran theologians in a way that weakened Luther's own connection between righteousness and justification. That development, in turn, facilitated Immanuel Kant's grounding of religion in ethics, which in turn sparked Albrecht Ritschl's insistence that, to the contrary, Christian ethics must be grounded in justification. Ritschl's disparaging use of the word *mysticism*—intended as a foil for his own account of justification—then was taken up by Brunner, who turned it into a category with which to discredit Schleiermacher. But Brunner's aspersions were based on a misreading: he mistakenly understood Schleiermacher's theory of consciousness as flat subjectivism—an attempt to ground religion in the individual subject's prelinguistic experience of his or her own interiority. In reality, Helmer reminds us, Schleiermacher made specific ontological claims, about which she has much to say in the second portion of the book.

Unfortunately, Brunner's reductive reading of Schleiermacher was so successfully established that Schleiermacher became the fall guy for subsequent generations of theologians who yearned for a God who stood unassailably outside all human constructs and cultures. Over time this outsideness came to be identi-

fied with the divine word—with God having spoken in a way that is prior to and unconditioned by any human speech, even as it also makes such speech possible. One sees this in Barth, certainly, and in Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, which Helmer's title *Theology and the End of Doctrine* is meant to evoke.

One can have sympathy, as Helmer does, for 20th-century theologians' desire for a God whose divine word cuts clean through any historical and cultural context. The problem, Helmer argues, is that this set of theological maneuvers caused doctrine to come to another bad end.

Taking cues from Barth and Lindbeck, many Western theologians have so insisted on doctrine's absolute priority that doctrine has lost any ability to refer to anything. The doctrinal claim that "God is triune," for example, is said to be an epistemic category that normatively organizes Christian thought and speech. But this normativity "is secured," Helmer points out, by its assignment to the "church-creed analytic that has been cut off from any divine transcendent reality. Doctrine has lost its witnessing capacity to the God who might call doctrine into question." Systematic theology winds up having little to say about God's transforming activity in the world, and



Theology and the End of Doctrine

By Christine Helmer

Westminster John Knox, 248 pp., \$35.00 paperback

Sarah Morice Brubaker teaches theology at Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

far too much to say about the conditions of possibility for systematic theology.

In the final part of the book, Helmer suggests that we can revive doctrine by employing insights from the much-maligned Schleiermacher, of all people. Of course, such recuperation will require us to toss out the reductive readings of the German theologian and look instead at what he was really saying. If we do so, Helmer argues, we will find ways of making theological claims about God and Christ that are understood properly as acclamation: statements of identity ("You are the Christ!") that have a clear external referent but also reflect an individual's experience of a transforming encounter. Theology as acclamation can do more than explain how theological speech is possible. It can say things about a transcendent God—a God who may decry the ways in which some ostensibly normative doctrine has been produced. Yet such a theology manages not to lose historical grounding, for it expects that individuals and communities will have unique responses to a transforming encounter with God.

This is a challenging book that contains many lines of thought I have not been able to mention here, and it is a marvelously worthwhile challenge. (To give but one teaser: the discussion of the relationship between theology and religious studies should be required reading for anyone with a vested interest in either guild.) The writing is blessedly lucid and interesting. Making one's way through the conceptual sophistication is a pleasure rather than a chore.

Those who are not extremely well versed in Schleiermacher will need to read the first part of the book slowly, ideally with Schleiermacher's writings in hand and a highlighter at the ready. That said, one could do worse than encounter Schleiermacher for the first time via *Theology and the End of Doctrine*, for one would not come away with the sort of cheap misreading that tends to abound.

Schleiermacher scholar or no, those who deal in theological method would do well to spend some time with *Theology and the End of Doctrine* and to be reminded why doctrine can be life-giving after all.

True and Holy: Christian Scripture and Other Religions

By Leo D. Lefebure

Orbis, 224 pp., \$30.00 paperback

Engagement in serious, respectful conversation with other religious traditions is increasingly urgent. Leo Lefebure of Georgetown University details why this engagement is not only urgent but difficult.

The book is primarily a historical report on the vexing attitudes and practices of Christians. Over time, Christians have frequently articulated their faith with absolutist claims and have assessed other great religious traditions by that norm, often with demeaning caricature and stereotype.

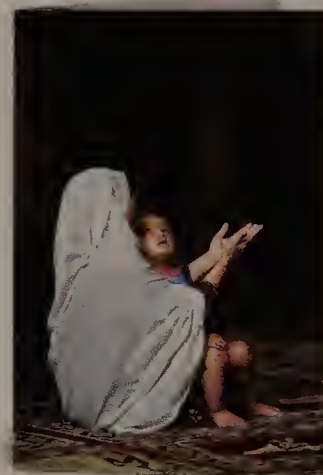
Lefebure frames the problem as a hermeneutic of hostility versus a hermeneutic of hospitality. Much of the hostility that has dominated Christian attitudes has been grounded in, or understood to be grounded in, scripture—thus the book's subtitle. Lefebure urges that it is past time for a hermeneutic of hospitality that takes other religious traditions seriously, respects them, and expects to learn from them.

The book opens with two chapters that define the principles and possibilities for such engagement. Lefebure traces the impulse of respect for other religious traditions that has always been present in Christian teaching, noticing the openness voiced by Origen and Augustine, and in recent times by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, both of whom allow for imaginative possibility and exhibit a capacity to critique their own absolutist claims.

Lefebure writes from a Roman Catholic perspective and judges that the new openings articulated by Vatican Council II are of immense importance for future work. Specifically, the dogmatic constitution *Nostra Aetate* acknowledged that Christian faith is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and that Judaism is a continuing

Reviewed by Walter Brueggemann, whose most recent book is From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms (forthcoming from Westminster John Knox).

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tradition of God's commitment to the chosen people, a status that has not been abrogated. In *Lumen Gentium*, moreover, the Vatican Council opened a way for new engagement with Muslims. It is impossible to overstate the courage and significance of these statements, notwithstanding the determined efforts by some since the council to undo their impact. Lefebure shows that the council acted against the mainstream of hostility in a way that amounted to repentance on the part of the church.

The core of the book consists of four chapters detailing the history of Christian attitudes and practices toward Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism in turn. The news is not good: the Christian tradition has been dominated by hostility as it has defended its own absolutism and an assumption of its superiority that is often linked to the supposed superiority of Euro-American culture. This hostility is particularly acute and poisonous toward the other book religions, Judaism and Islam, and less so toward the Eastern religions.

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Lefebure's presentation of Christian attitudes toward Judaism is very tough reading because those attitudes are almost unrelievedly hostile, a basis for which is easily found in the New Testament. In the later tradition carefully traced here, the negative view of Judaism is vigorous, including supersessionism and charges of "Christ killer"—a negation repeated by Aquinas and Luther. Later even Schleiermacher and Barth joined the chorus, even though their stances on theological matters might have allowed otherwise. The book does offer emerging evidence of a more hospitable interface in recent times, with reference to Ricoeur, Jürgen Moltmann, Mary Boys, and Sandra Schneiders. Lefebure notes the way in which Christian Zionism has taken a different but equally problematic stance toward Judaism.

The history of Christian attitudes toward Islam is equally distressing and difficult. In Christian tradition, Islam is often taken as a Christian heresy, or Muhammad is seen as a forerunner of the Antichrist. Of course, the Crusades only fed and intensified the negativity. In this case, Lefebure singles out Francis of Assisi for positive notice. For hospitable engagement in recent times he credits Louis Massignon, Thomas Merton, Hans Küng, and Miroslav Volf.

Lefebure reports a different tone concerning Hinduism and Buddhism, with which Christians have attempted to find common ground even though the missionary movement tended to regard Hinduism as idolatry. As might be expected, Gandhi's presence and influence loom large in Lefebure's chronicle. Vatican II's emphasis on inculturation and the urgency of Dalit theology attract important attention.

A viable interface with Buddhism has been much pursued by Christians who have found common ground in the dimension of mystery to which both Christian faith and Buddhism seek to give expression. Among recent interpreters who have sought a generative interface with Buddhism are C. S. Song, Kosuke Koyama, and, again, Merton. Lefebure concludes:

It is a great paradox that even though Buddhists and Christians differ pro-

foundly on fundamental questions of cosmology and anthropology, nevertheless from various perspectives, participants in dialogue have repeatedly discovered resonances that have transformed and enriched their lives.

This careful and detailed account of interactions over time is a unique piece of scholarship. Without doubt, a sharpened awareness of historical hostility is important; there is so much for Christians to unlearn and so much for which to repent.

The conclusion of the book reflects on possible ways forward, but Lefebure keeps expectations low and limited. He suggests that Bernard Lonergan's proposal of new levels of consciousness may hold promise:

Lonergan's call for a multilevel intellectual, moral, and religious conversion offers a framework for interpreting the turn away from traditional Christian interpretations of the Bible toward a more respectful, generous approach to the Bible in relation to other religious traditions. At its best Christian theological reflection seeks to understand and be guided by the true, the good, and the beautiful, transcendental notions that are important for other religious traditions as well.

Lefebure rightly critiques René Girard's one-size-fits-all reductionism, but his focus on Lonergan and Girard in the conclusion is at best disappointing because they are too theoretical. A better reference point might be found in Emmanuel Levinas and his accent on the "face of the other": new attitudes cannot be arrived at internally, but only with exteriority—in dialogue with the other. It is in engagement with the other, without any grand theory, that hostility may turn to hospitality.

True and Holy is an important opportunity to recover our less than glorious history as Christians. Lefebure's appeal to Vatican II is an ideal place from which to begin the journey from hostility to hospitality: it was a council of uncommon generosity—exactly the generosity required in a world of alienation, miscommunication, and ideologies that lead to violence.

Mapping Exile and Return: Palestinian Dispossession and a Political Theology for a Shared Future

By Alain Epp Weaver

Fortress, 176 pp., \$39.00 paperback

Every author who has written critically about the conflict between Israel and Palestine has confronted a fundamental cross-cultural problem, and Alain Epp Weaver is no exception. Israeli political ideology and social practices and the Israeli legal system are so far removed from the typical American's experience that although the words of Israelis' essays and books make sense to American readers, their meaning and impact are often beyond such readers' grasp.

How is a reader to understand any author who writes about something that contradicts the reader's experience, yet purports to describe the real world? In Israeli-controlled lands, for instance, heavily armed soldiers check a person's national ID card to determine his or her religious and ethnic identity before allowing or forbidding the person to go home or to work or school. What would it mean to Americans if an armed soldier from China were to check their national ID in Chicago? The United States has no national ID, and certainly nothing that denotes one's race and religion. Neither the National Guard nor China's military is staffing checkpoints on neighborhood streets because there are no checkpoints. And a person of one particular religion or ethnicity is not entitled to more legal rights and privileges than a person of another religion or ethnicity. Even when accurately and sensitively described, the meanings of these experiences are simply beyond most Americans, except those who have visited Palestine and Israel.

Yet Epp Weaver refers to and presupposes the real, incongruent, and incomprehensible experiences of many persons in Israel and of everyone in Israeli-controlled Palestine. Many readers who enter this troubled territory through books like *Mapping Exile and Return* will just not get it; the chasm is simply too large between Western religious freedom, equal civil rights, and separation of church

and state on the one hand and Israeli laws, mores, and practices on the other.

Nevertheless, having spent 11 years in Israel and Palestine on assignments with the Mennonite Central Committee, Epp Weaver is well suited for the task of describing the people, places, and culture of the Levant. He offers a new hermeneutic, a new way of seeing, a new conceptual bridge to explain the Israel/Palestine conflict to U.S. readers and to suggest a way forward.

Epp Weaver metaphorically uses a family of common terms (such as *cartography*, *map* and *mapping*, *space* and *place*, and *arboreal imagination*) to describe the situation and to construct a new reality in Israel and Palestine. He reminds his readers that mapmaking is not a factual drawing of territory on a blank piece of paper as some may think; rather, it is highly subjective and always a self-portrait. More precisely, mapping is a projection of the self into one's imagined world in order to bring that world into existence.

Israel's Zionist mapping has erased Palestine and many Palestinian villages from its physical maps and Palestinians from the political discussions of much of the world. It has thus imaginatively constructed the modern state of Israel without its historical antecedents, without many of its contemporary features, and without its Palestinian population. Israel does not identify its Palestinian citizens as Palestinians but merely as Arabs, thus erasing the Palestinian culture that distinguishes them from other Arabs such as those of Egypt and Morocco. According to the government of Israel, there are no Palestinians in Israel.

Virtually all Palestinian mappings oppose the privileged position of Zionist mapping, and a few Palestinian maps erase Israel just as Palestine has been erased by Israel—which is the fear of most Israeli Jews. Epp Weaver's counter-mapping explores and adamantly affirms the possibility that Palestinian mapping and return from exile can become reconciliatory rather than replicating the Zionist form of return from exile that erased Palestine. To break the

Reviewed by Paul Parker, who teaches religious studies and chairs the Department of Religious Studies at Elmhurst College in Illinois.

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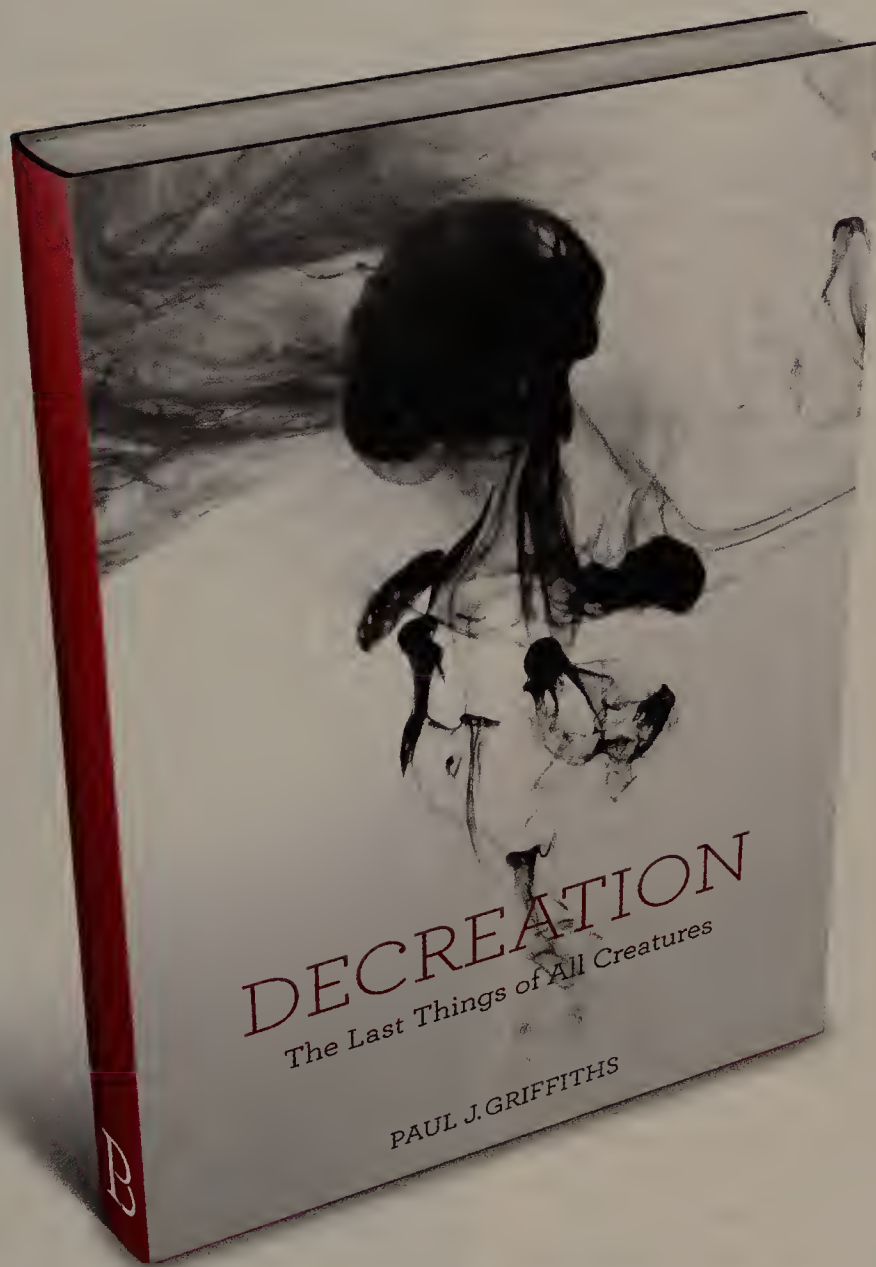


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cycle of returning exiles making new exiles, Epp Weaver argues for an explicitly Christian “theological cartography of land and return” that is at the same time a nonsectarian palimpsest of heterogeneous and interpenetrating peoples.

Epp Weaver builds on Palestinian scholar Edward Said’s understanding of exile not only as physical displacement, but also as a permanent critical mentality that rejects all forms of injustice. Coming from Said’s perspective, Epp Weaver rejects Zionism’s negative political theology that sees exile only as a curse to be reversed through return, regardless of the cost to Palestinians. He also employs the political theology of Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder to reject political exclusivism, inequality, and domination, which is the temptation of a small proportion of Palestinians.

Finally, Epp Weaver draws on the inclusive, binational, and democratic model of statehood proposed by Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, a professor of Jewish history at Ben-Gurion University. This is a theology of the land that does not negate exile but incorporates the meaning of exile into the return from exile. This kind of interreligious Palestinian countermapping is not only possible, says Epp Weaver, but has already been demonstrated by the surviving inhabitants of the ethnically cleansed village of Kafr Bir’im and its favorite son, the newly retired Melkite archbishop for Galilee, Elias Chacour.

Will Epp Weaver’s readers be better able to understand the conflict between Israel and Palestine because of his innovative approach? Early in his book Epp Weaver quotes the broadly influential French philosopher Henri Lefebvre about the relevance of new and alternative interpretations: “How many maps, in the descriptive or geographical sense, might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meaning and contents? It is doubtful whether a finite number can ever be given in answer to this sort of question.” There is always room for another illuminative decoding of the inscrutable. For those of us who are drawn to maps and cartography, this book will be fresh, engaging, and possibly revelatory. And for those who are not map junkies, there are still other excellent analyses.

Gold

By Barbara Crooker

Cascade, 80 pp., \$11.00 paperback

I find myself reading *Gold* at the height of October. Wind whips maple leaves and false sunflower petals into the sky, the colors as bold as fingerpaint. As the beauty intensifies, the sense of impending death—the first killing frost at the edge of all this autumn glory—intensifies as well. Having recently entered middle age, I feel like I’ve reached that edge myself. Wasn’t it summer just yesterday? But a muscle I pulled six weeks ago still hasn’t healed. I’m a bit more tired and ragged. And this year I tune into beauty more than ever before.

Barbara Crooker, a prolific, award-winning poet and teacher, writes in the throes of such beauty. Her books *Radiance*, *Line Dance*, and *More* resonate with the lushness of heightened senses. Known for her interest in ekphrastic work,

Crooker enters the shades and brush strokes of daily life with such a reverence for the physicality of the world that readers want to take notice, live better, and, in the case of *Gold*, die better.

Gold begins with a series of lyric poems about autumn, lines afire with cornstalks and chrysanthemums, finches’ wings, stripteasing maples, and leaves going “presto chango, garnet / and gold.” Although Crooker makes it clear in these poems, sometimes painfully, that “nothing gold can stay,” she acknowledges nature’s victory, even on the brink of decay, over the world’s struggles with school shooters and a plummeting Dow Jones. But soon enough, Crooker foreshadows her own descent into grief in the poem “Late Prayer,” in which she wonders, “Will I be strong / enough to row across the ocean of loss / when my turn comes to take the oars?”

Reviewed by Tania Runyan, a poet from Lindenhurst, Illinois, and author of *How to Read a Poem* (T. S. Poetry Press).



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Crooker's "ocean of loss," first mentioned in the poem "All Saints," surrounds the death of her mother. While both the speaker and her mother anticipate the approaching end, they hold on to all that is sweet—often literally. Her mother fills herself with sugary treats, and Crooker captures the sensual details with the urgency of her mother's appetite: "Right hand limp under the sheet, / she grabbed that donut / in her left, and squeezed. The pallid yellow filling / ran down her arm, and chocolate oozed between her fingers." This description of an ecstatic feast, the sweetest Eucharist imaginable, mirrors the poems themselves, which ooze palpably with life in the presence of suffering. Crooker not only accepts but praises death. She clings to the joy of spooning soup into her mother's mouth at the very end, of attending to her last "fluttering" breaths.

After loving her mother to the wrenching end, even down to her ashes, Crooker continues to grieve throughout the seasons, wishing she could tell her mother about the spring redbuds and writing her mother's name in the air with sparklers on the Fourth. Even when the poems turn to topics not explicitly concerning this passing, the pain seeps into other losses: the ever-increasing distance of childhood memories, the aging body, and the death of friends. But still the balance of hope and beauty pulses in the poet's every walk, every museum visit, every encounter—even in the sprawling zucchini in the garden.

In a 2011 interview with Katy Giebenhain in the *Seminary Ridge Review*, Crooker remarks, "What I'm looking for in contemporary spiritual poetry is work that looks at sense of slant. I'm looking for words to help me be a person of God in a secular world, words that will give me hope in a time of darkness, words that will fan the fires of faith that sometimes flicker dimly." As a spiritual poet, Crooker indeed tells the story of faith slant, bringing the reader nearer to heaven by remaining so close to Earth. Exhorted to avoid clinging too closely to the ways of the world, believers often feel the need to detach themselves. However, as Crooker demonstrates, attending to creation and to life's quotidian tasks reflects the way of Christ and his incarnation. In "Vaudeville," the poet writes, "The house light / turns everything golden, and even though we know / what's coming, the next act, we start to believe / we can stay here forever in the amber spotlight, / that night's black velvet curtain will never fall." Living in the golden moment, the "amber spotlight" of God's beauty, is not an avoidance or denial of "the next act," but a victory. Do not be anxious about anything, Paul reminds us, but focus on the true, the honorable, and the lovely. Live in peace now. Soak in the light.

This autumn, like Crooker, I am allowing the waning sun to pour down on me "from the great glass jar of the sky." Warmed by the honest grief—and resulting hope—illuminating *Gold*, I will face the coming winter with my fires of faith fanned.

BookMarks

Defrocked: How a Father's Act of Love Shook the United Methodist Church

By Franklyn Schaefer
with Sherri Wood Emmons

Chalice Press, 128 pp., \$15.99 paperback

Schaefer's story of being tried and defrocked by the United Methodist Church for having performed his gay son's marriage received wide coverage. Stories of conflict are never as simple as they're conveyed, and this is true here. Schaefer's church in Pennsylvania was growing. A contemporary worship service was added to its traditional service and began to attract more worshipers than the traditional service. Congregants knew Schaefer had a gay son, and this led to the development of a "concern group." Then the son of a disaffected chancel choir director pursued the case to prosecute Schaefer for disobeying church law. Although the accusation set in motion a chain of events that altered Schaefer's life, he never regretted his actions. (Schaefer has recently been reinstated through an appeal process. See News, p. 19.)

Gabriel: A Poem

By Edward Hirsch
Knopf, 96 pp., \$26.95

Hirsch writes a book-length lament in verse for his son, who died at age 22 from a drug overdose. Gabriel was diagnosed with one mental disorder after another. One doctor told Hirsch, "Think of the brain as a switchboard. . . / He has a lot of things knocked out." Of the loss of his son, Hirsch writes: "What else are there but rituals / To cover up the emptiness." He admits that "When my son's suffering ended / My own began." Hirsch is angry at God, a God he's not even sure exists: "I will not forgive you / Indifferent God / Until you give me back my son." Hirsch artfully weaves into his stanzas the experiences of other poets and artists who lost a child, as if to become part of a support group for grieving parents.

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Sex in the lab

We are scientists, after all,” says Virginia Johnson (Lizzy Caplan) as she removes her blouse and bra and places Bill Master’s (Michael Sheen) hand on her breast. The Showtime series *Masters of Sex* follows the sex researchers from the late 1950s through the early 1960s. In an early episode the couple begins to sleep together for the purposes of science.

This might sound like a handy excuse for an affair, but that’s only part of the story. Sex, Bill argues, is a taboo subject in science because of moral and religious interpretations. By explaining what happens to the human body during sex he hopes to lift the shroud and receive a Noble Prize for his achievements. (He proves his point about the taboo of sex and demonstrates the size of his ego when he shows his colleagues a video of a woman masturbating.) For Virginia this study is the first time she’s been taken seriously as a woman of ideas. And as someone who’s been divorced twice and is frequently in casual relationships, she has her own reason for fighting sexual taboos.

Both researchers are motivated by their scientific investigation and believe that sleeping together is part of their work. But their motivations are of course more complicated: it’s after having sexual fantasies about Virginia that Bill proposes that they “undertake the work,” while Virginia initiates the sexual encounter immediately after Bill promotes her. Science, power, attraction, and control become entangled as they go to bed.

The show exploits the tension between scientific explanations of sex and the way most of us experience sex. The naked bodies wired up in a laboratory room are not nearly as titillating as the

melodramas that unfold between the characters when they’re fully clothed. It turns out that the drama of sex is more powerful than any scientific explanation.

The real Masters and Johnson helped transform the way that people experience and talk about sex. They spoke of sex as something natural and healthy that could be pursued for the sake of pleasure. They debunked myths about female sexuality and the variety of sexual experience that is healthy and desirable. They gave sex a scientific vocabulary just as the sexual revolution of the 1960s was pushing against the moral vocabulary that had long defined America’s discussions (or lack of discussions) about sexual experience.

But *Masters of Sex* makes clear that the impulse to describe human sexual response can quickly bleed into a desire to proscribe it. It’s a small jump from understanding how the body behaves in sex to generating “protocols” or “scripts” that dictate how the body should behave. Our desires will always exceed and complicate any such scripts.

This is good news. I am reminded of Walker Percy’s novel *The Moviegoer*. Binx Bolling, who is searching for life’s meaning and meaningful relationships, finds himself frustrated by the “techniquing” of sex. Sex as something to be mastered does not finally satisfy him.

Masters and Johnson pursued “sexual technique.” They frequently paired men and women who had never met and then observed them having sex. This impersonalization of sex is belied by their own relationship, which mixed sex with questions of emotion, attraction, intimacy, and commitment—factors that are impossible to account for in an experiment.

The tension between Masters and Johnson’s messy affair and their attempt to describe it scientifically makes for scintillating television. It’s also a good reminder of the limits of scientific thinking in our own discernment about sexual behavior. Good sexual technique doesn’t make good sexual theology. For that we have to accept that sex is more often marked by humor and humility than by ecstasy and mastery.



PIONEERING COUPLE: Michael Sheen and Lizzy Caplan play famous sex researchers William Masters and Virginia Johnson in the TV series.

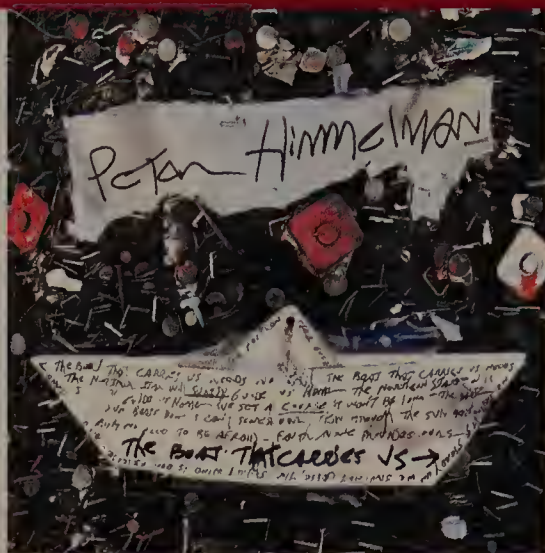
The author is Kathryn Reklis, who teaches theology at Fordham University and is codirector of the Institute for Art, Religion, and Social Justice.

ON Music

The Boat That Carries Us Peter Himmelman (Himmasongs)

Peter Himmelman is a rock 'n' roll anomaly: an observant Jew who has long declined to play any shows on the sabbath. But this serious commitment to his faith gives his songs heft. He's addressed brokenness, healing, and humility in songs such as "Impermanent Things" and "Mission of My Soul." And Himmelman has a knack for melding lyrical complexity with catchy melody.

On *The Boat That Carries Us*, he demonstrates that he still has the touch. He's got a stellar crew backing him, including drummer Jim Keltner (who played on solo albums for three of the four Beatles) and bassist Lee Sklar (James Taylor, Michael Jackson). They pound out jungle rhythm on "Angels



Die" and chug with rockabilly delight on "In the Hour of Ebbing Light," where Himmelman juxtaposes images of cities about to burn against a last-chance journey back to Eden. It's a song in which light and shadow wrestle, and any chance of escape comes only in the twilight time.

"On 33K Feet," Himmelman again conjures extremes—the soaring speed of air flight with the exhaustion of travel, all giving way to the mysterious feeling of being "somehow complete." The song is anchored by a plaintive electric guitar riff built around two screaming notes,

giving the effect of staring down on dark, swift cumulus clouds from an airplane window.

On minor-key tone poem "Green Mexican Dreams," Himmelman's protagonist drives a black El Camino into a whirlwind, reciting psalms and beholding visions of St. John Bosco, who tells him: "The road to hell is impossible to drive." The predawn darkness eventually yields the promise of "coming home" and rising "far above the ashes of this solitary day."

The title cut documents an altogether different travel vision in a sparse musical milieu. Here it's just Himmelman and his acoustic guitar, delivering a modern-day psalm of encouragement: "An unseen hand moves us all / The darkest sky gives way to dawn / The boat that carries us needs no sail."

Anchored from start to finish by Himmelman's robust singing—the voice of a confident rocker who eschews melodrama for mellow soulfulness—*The Boat That Carries Us* crackles with special songs. They transport us, one way or another, toward wholeness, surrender, and striving for something deeper.

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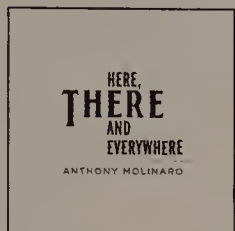
Stefano Bollani
(ECM)



Those who love Bill Evans or Art Blakey will relish this disc, though Stefano Bollani has his own freewheeling improv stamp. Recorded in one day, and featuring guitarist Bill Frisell, *Joy* pulses with live energy. Bollani pilots his piano with sophisticated trills, rolls, and riffs. Colors run the gamut from the whimsical theme and bouncy beat of "No Pope No Party" to "Las Hortensias," where Bollani hits the high keys to create the effect of a broken clock. Highly recommended.

Here, There and Everywhere

Anthony Molinaro
[self-released;
anthonymolinaro.com]



Many Beatles tribute discs fail because the vocalists or players aren't up to the task. But with this piano-based instrumental disc, Chicago's Anthony Molinaro shatters barriers in refreshing ways. On the opening "Blackbird," he manages to inject the melody with stride-piano infectiousness. Elsewhere, "The Long and Winding Road" employs complicated chords in the verse where you wouldn't expect them, along with flowing runs that capture the feeling invoked by the title. Highly recommended.

Blow

Louis Prima Jr. and the Witnesses
(Warrior)



Is it rock? Swing? Boogie-woogie? Louis Prima Jr. (son of the famous comic swing artist) melodiously mixes all of the above. This music moves—often with greased-lightning groove, as on the instrumental title track and "Go, Let's Go" (which features a frenetic guitar solo). The record has its touching

moments, too, as when Prima Sr. and Jr. share a duet (à la Nat and Natalie Cole) on "That's My Home," one of the old man's deeper tracks.

You Should Be So Lucky

Benmont Tench
(Blue Note)



On his first solo album, Tom Petty's keyboardist handles the songwriting and vocal duties admirably, his baritone sounding much like former Dire Straits frontman Mark Knopfler. Produced by Glyn Johns (the Who, the Beatles), *Lucky* moves along at a melodic clip, from the mournful ballad "Today I Took Your Picture Down" to the 1960s pop homage "Like the Sun (Michoacan)," which recalls the Kinks' "Sunny Afternoon."

Tarpaper Sky

Rodney Crowell
(New West)



Rodney Crowell, longtime guitarist for Emmylou Harris, hit songwriter for Waylon Jennings and the Oak Ridge Boys, demonstrates artistic integrity here, refusing to cave to country-pop trends. Nothing here is calculated; the album was recorded live in a studio. From the sensuous, steady-rolling "Fever on the Bayou" (complete with a verse sung in French) to the rockabilly-tinged, heartfelt prayer "Jesus Talk to Mama," Crowell shows off a wide lyrical and stylistic range.

—Lou Carlozo, a music producer in Chicago

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by Philip Jenkins

Imperial missionaries?

Whether we like it or not, the world's religious landscape owes much to the long history of European imperialism. But the story of empire and missions is much more complex than we might assume, and some common assumptions need debunking. In the case of some of the largest and most enduring empires, the relationship between faith and empire was strongly counterintuitive.

To some degree, all the European empires claimed religious justification for their existence, citing a command to extend the light of God's kingdom into regions of pagan ignorance. But that is very different from forcing or demanding that their new subjects accept Christianity. The Spanish and Portuguese certainly did impose their faith, and we must ruefully admit their success in accomplishing this. Just glance at a map of the world's Catholic populations.

Other empires, though, conceived their role very differently. Until the mid-19th century, the British viewed their vast Indian possessions in strictly economic terms and actively discouraged any evangelization that could provoke the wrath of Hindu and Muslim elites. For many years, missionaries faced deportation, and only grudgingly did authorities tolerate newcomers like the famous missionary William Carey.

Although it is hard to generalize about long periods, the British, Dutch, and other

imperial authorities usually had a strong prejudice in favor of Muslims as interlocutors, soldiers, and public servants. Muslims, they felt, were brave fighters, and they had a strong sense of honor and the value of oaths, making them vastly preferable to pagans or polytheists. Also, once officials had dealt with Muslims in, say, India, they regarded them as a known quantity when encountered elsewhere.

Native Christians, in contrast, were disliked and distrusted. Secular authorities saw them as potential troublemakers who destabilized their familiar communities. Converts were disturbingly likely to claim equality with their imperial masters, and in extreme cases, successful missionaries might publicly denounce imperial abuses.

The empires therefore faced an impossible dilemma: they needed to be seen supporting missionary endeavors, yet they had very mixed feelings about any potential successes. Only beginning around the end of the 19th century did the empires devote themselves more enthusiastically to Christian expansion.

We see this paradox in the history of the Dutch empire, which is relatively little known to Anglo-Americans. In the East Indies, the Dutch empire was very long-lived—almost 350 years—and it ran a close second to British India in wealth and economic potential. But it never created

a Christian society like those of Latin America.

The Dutch East India Company (the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC) dates from 1602. In 1619, it founded its capital at Batavia (Jakarta) and spread its influence over much of the vast territory that we today call Indonesia. The Netherlands at this time was fiercely Calvinist to the extent that all public officials were required to be communicant members of the Reformed Church. You would never guess this established status, though, from the eastern colonies. In the immediate area around Batavia, the Dutch installed Reformed worship and prohibited other faiths, but they made few such efforts.

Evangelistic work—notionally the responsibility of the VOC—was patchy at best, and mainly involved keeping out rival Catholic missionaries. By the start of the 18th century, the Bible had been translated into Malay, the regional lingua franca used by the VOC in its commercial dealings. That Bible, however, was quite inaccessible to the vast majority of local people, with their many distinctive vernaculars. If they chose not to learn Malay in order to read the Bible, that was their misfortune.

Matters changed with the end of the VOC at the end of the 18th century. Mission work

was thrown open to all denominations. The Netherlands Missionary Society dates from 1797. Even then, the Dutch pursued their primary goal of *rust en orde* (peace and order) by strictly limiting the potential scope of missions. Evangelistic efforts were strongly directed toward animist believers on the fringes rather than toward Java's large Muslim majority.

The Dutch never forgot that their continued rule depended on maintaining the tacit acquiescence of Muslim spiritual and political leaders, and they constrained mission efforts accordingly. Dutch authorities, meanwhile, freely tolerated the practice of Islamic law among Dutch subjects and made no objection to Islamic expansion.

At first sight, the strong Christian presence in modern Indonesia seems to contradict the idea that the Dutch commitment to mission was half-hearted. At least 10 percent of Indonesians are Christian—some 25 million strong. A great many of these, though, trace their Christian roots to the Portuguese presence that predated the Dutch takeover or to very modern Pentecostal activism. Distinctively Reformed believers make up only a tiny minority. As the Dutch experience shows, the demands of empire and mission starkly contradicted each other.

Philip Jenkins recently wrote The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade.

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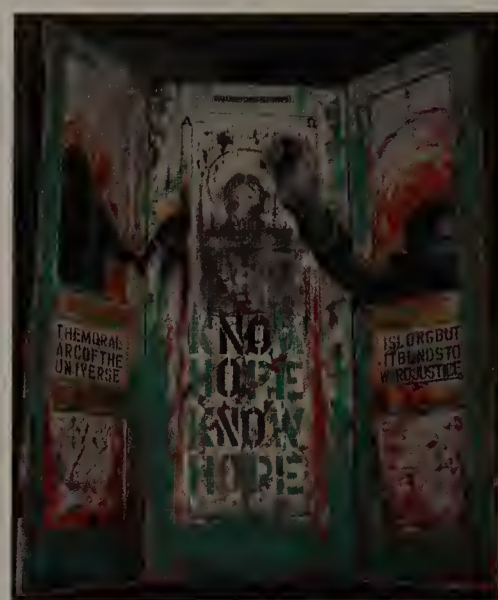
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The gallery at Nashville's Downtown Presbyterian Church | *Triptych*, by Cary Gibson

Downtown Presbyterian Church, known for its artists-in-residence program and studio spaces (see Carol Howard Merritt's "Revived by the arts," Sept. 17), is now bringing in the local urban community. With a gallery space that incorporates older architectural features and a contemporary look (complete with high-end track lighting), the church is part of Nashville's growing gallery scene, with increasing foot traffic from the city's monthly First Saturday Art Crawl. Artist-in-residence Cary Gibson has been key in developing the space and curating shows. One of her works, *Triptych*, includes images from a Cairo protest photo that went viral during the Arab Spring uprisings. The triptych incorporates several quotes (partially obscured), including one by Henri Nouwen: "You are Christian only so long as you constantly pose critical questions to the society you live in . . . so long as you stay unsatisfied with the status quo and keep saying that a new world is yet to come." Downtown Presbyterian is committed to posing these critical questions, with its church doors flung open in invitation.

Art selection and comment by Lil Copan, a painter and editor in Boston.

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